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## ASTRONOMY

# On the trail of the comet

John North

### VICTOR CLUBE and BILL NAPIER

*The Cosmic Serpent: A catastrophist view of Earth History*  
296p. Faber, £12.50.  
0 571 1816 X

"The Cosmic Serpent" is a name given to a hypothetical giant comet, a fiery dragon of a thing that hurled thunderbolts and generally caused havoc in prehistoric times. If you find the hypothesis acceptable, you can say that three thousand years have all but erased the terror of those events from human memory; but that Victor Clube and Bill Napier, two professional astronomers, have caught the comet by its hypothetical tail, before it slipped from human awareness completely. They have written an exciting book about it, a book which, with its carefully calculated exterior, contains many new and challenging arguments. Patrick Moore declares on the jacket that it is one of the most extraordinary books he has ever read. The astronomical part is perhaps more sober than the title suggests - a wolf in serpent's clothing, in fact. The clothing is at times plainly uncomfortable, but was presumably donned to attract an excitement-loving public that would have been bored by the title: "A Catastrophist View of Earth History". From an astronomical point of view, this is in a very different class from most popular catastrophist writing. Velikovskians will feel more at home if they read the work backwards, for it is at the end that the more sensational rewriting of history comes, not to mention a few kind words about Velikovskian's historical excursions. Fair-minded readers be warned.

The Cosmic Serpent is a splendid source of object lessons in how and how not to write for a wide public. Should the university world ever go into another phase of reckless expansion, some research institute for scientific-rhetorical orthopraxis might well pull it under the microscope, to study its peculiar blend of fine-framed argument and fantasy. Structurally speaking, it fits together beautifully. There are touches of modernism in the fine detail in the form of phrases like "0.1 per cent of a kilometre", but they are offset by passages such as that taking for granted the notion of "hydrogen burning" in stars. Generally speaking, it is a model of plain exposition. It is rather a bore when it moralizes about the Establishment, about bandwagons falling over cliffs, the unwisdom of a prescribed wisdom, and so forth; but it has a steady scientific touch in its use of the word "scenario", which is sprinkled over its pages like dross over the globe. Historians will have to bear in mind that Copernicus and Tycho are lunar craters. How difficult to remember every reader, even a reviewer, and yet if the thesis of the work is acceptable, there is a reason why every reader should be concerned for the history of the world in its state.

The book opens with a lengthy sermon on scientific scepticism. It is pointed out that astronomers disagree about many things - for example, about quasars, spectral displacement in the light from distant star systems, and the evolution of them, the galaxies. Our Sun is of course a member of a star system ("the Galaxy") with a characteristically spiral form. It is generally accepted that the universe of galaxies is expanding. Dr Clube has argued elsewhere against this view, and in favour of the view that our Galaxy is in a state of rapid expansion. He believes that this idea is the very heart of the book, that there are apocalyptic bursts of activity within the nuclei of individual galaxies, at intervals of, say, 100 million years, resulting in the ejection of material with enormous velocities.

Briefly, the spiral arms of our Galaxy are young, and our Sun is old. The Sun moves steadily through the spiral arms, crossing them every 30 million years - and having crossed what is known as Gould's belt about ten years ago. Now the Galaxy has been three explosions in its life. The last 100 million years, perhaps 30 million years ago, the consequences of crossing the

spiral arms, some astronomers have thought that proximity to a supernova, an exploding star, might have upset the history of life on Earth; others that interstellar gas clouds might have provided us with our ice ages; but here it is argued - and at a qualitative level very convincingly - that our solar system acts as a large gravitational scoop, as it were, for billions of large solid bodies. These "planetesimals", or conglomerates of ice, dust, and rock, include our comets. Recent telescopic evidence is put forward for the existence of gigantic interstellar comets, and a sketch is included of the way they might grow in interstellar space. To a catastrophist Earth historian, though, the question of paramount interest concerns their potential bombardment of the Earth, probably been struck about ten times by missiles with energies of the order of

ten or twenty million hydrogen bombs, and once or twice by objects with twenty times as much energy. Tennyson's "Nature, red in tooth and claw" suddenly becomes an almost cosy image.

How plausible is all this? I can only say that, irritating as I find their occasional side-swipes at mainstream opinion, their vague talk of a "new physics", and their tendency to introduce quite irrelevant bits of scientific history whenever things are getting exciting, I am willingly carried along by the general drift of the two writers' astronomical arguments. Craters seem to be ubiquitous in the solar system. Studies of the lunar surface suggest that the cratering rate was once higher than it is now. Hudson's Bay and the Gulf of Mexico are perhaps impact structures, and plausibly: huge impacts in the remote

past, and much more frequent encounters with smaller bodies in Earth-crossing orbits, even in relatively recent times. Objects in this second class would devastate areas a few hundred miles across.

This is where the short-period comets come into the story. There are over a thousand members of the family of Apollo-type objects with a diameter of more than a kilometre, and these are explained as long-period comets pulled into their short-period orbits chiefly by Jupiter, and boiled dry, so to speak, relatively quickly. It is hard to explain why there are so many short-period comets. The suggestion made in the book is that they result from the fragmentation of a single large comet; but no matter. The important historical point is that one or two of them could well have come close to the Earth, with spectacular effects, both visually, and

important prehistoric gods which were comets in the sky. Lucretius prompts the hypothesis; but before reaching for a translation, you must bear in mind that it will have been done by someone for whom comets are not what they were in the mind of man. (Had it been otherwise, the somewhat dark comment goes, "scholarship would already have founded"). The drift of the argument is to show that although comets were once among our chief deities, later moves against naturalistic religions (by such as the Greeks, Amos, Zoroaster, and the Buddha) might have come because some comet got thrown out of the solar system, or because the fuel for its tail was used up. This unlikely tale hangs by a very slender thread, and Lucretius is the sceptic who gets most of the limelight in its telling. He comes along, refusing to find *mirabilia* in lands and Sun, sky and stars and Moon, and telling us that it wouldn't be right to impose a punishment "as on the rebellious Titans, on all those who by their reasoning . . . seek to darken . . . the Sun". The comment offered is that the argument "can make reasonable sense only if comets were among the gods and the Titans were a special group of comets which could somehow, on occasion, dim the Sun".

The excessively enthusiastic sleuthing doesn't stop there. For it to be thought possible that a comet may darken the Sun, "the knowledge that some very large comet indeed had at some time appeared must have been available". It doesn't seem to worry the two writers that such knowledge is not reported in a less oblique manner in other surviving texts. And almost as a justification for the tendentious argument that has just gone, they add quite gratuitously: "In like manner, one cannot casually reject the claim by Diodorus of Sicily that the Chaldeans for example knew about the regular return of periodic comets". Not casually, perhaps. (Lucretius is presumably meant to have known the principle, since when the Sun caught Pheton in his fall, and set him and his steeds on their proper course, we are invited to read the description of Pheton, "the overbearing torch of the firmament", as that of a regularly recurring comet.)

The Cosmic Serpent is filled with this sort of wishful thinking.

It is remarkable indeed how few are the recognizable references to comets as such in Babylonian and Egyptian records. This cannot be because they did not exist, so it must be because they were generally described as something else.

Once we recognize this fact, "we are obliged to see them as being among the most important and fundamental elements of the ancient sky", and "the Hellenic philosophers were thus responsible for a really quite major revolution in human thought: they were the first to describe comets in particular much as they appear to us, the first to make rational attempts to explain their origin in terms that we recognize as scientific". Such honesty in the degradation of one's strategy in *deception* is rare. The strategy is certainly powerful. The cosmic god Phos spews forth the deities Nemesis and Nemesis, and this suggests that either to be seen in space, but seismic vibrations on the Moon bear witness to trails of boulders in the wakes of comets, and of course meteor streams are evidence of old comet trails. Such trails last for a thousand years and more, and from them (and early historical records of them are not uncommon) we can say that the Earth has run across the orbit of something like fifty of them during the past two thousand years. The cosmic galaxy and Encke years in all probability sources of real terror on the Earth more than once in the past five thousand years.

This is where the confident astronomical trail ends, and the somewhat impressionistic historical and mythological trails begin. In striking contrast with the earlier sections of the book, there is rarely a clear display, or mention, of alternative interpretations. Not that there is anything lacking in range. Take natural philosophy, for example: the rise of materialism in classical times is associated with the passing away of



Dis (evil)aster (star): a nineteenth-century French cartoon reproduced from the book reviewed on this page.

Captured by the Sun's gravitational field, and put into orbit round the Sun, their acquisition by our solar system seems to be erratic, but their loss from the system is fairly steady. Some (unconventional) statistics for survival imply that the last batch to have been captured was acquired a few million years ago. It must be said that much of the book's scientific colour comes from its use of sparkling new observations and its authors' willingness to mention alternative interpretations. Evidence for the rates of acquisition of comets is drawn from meteoroids found on the Moon's surface. But do these come from the asteroid belt, or are they an interstellar dust, or of cometary origin? Spacecraft have already provided clues allowing some of the alternatives to be ruled out. Some comets get into the asteroid belt. Perhaps asteroids are inactive comets. There are fifty or so satellites, ring systems, and Chron satellite bodies in the solar system. (Chron is in orbit between Saturn and Uranus, and is of the size of a large asteroid - say as big as a good-sized mountain.) Five or two of the fifty are in unstable orbits, and are likely to be lost to the system, so the picture of a steady-state solar system seems to be wrong. This is a key point in the argument, for episodic capture of such objects by the solar system implies occasional bombardment of the Earth.

How often, and how catastrophic, are these encounters likely to have been? The suggestion is that we are likely to have been hit by objects the size of the asteroid Apollo a handful of times in the last few hundred million years. (Apollo was discovered in 1932, and was the first asteroid known to be in an Earth-crossing orbit, that is, to be in a potential collision "barrage".) More specifically, we are told that in the last 600 million years the Earth has

there is reason for thinking that there are many large impact structures on the Earth's surface of the order of a thousand kilometres across. Catastrophes on the scale suggested would of course lead to the sudden extinction of species, and provide an explanation for the apparently erratic extinction rates revealed by palaeontologists, with "brief episodes of mass extinction of organisms followed by invasions of new forms into vacated ecological zones" (N. D. Newall). Does the fact that major extinctions seem to be associated with the principal geological boundaries (Permian to Triassic, and so on) mean that they share a common cause? In the case of one boundary there is a sudden jump in the concentration of Iridium in clay (at the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary). Iridium perhaps of interstellar origin.

But there are possible effects other than at the Earth's surface. Quite modest (and hence more frequent) impacts could well re-align the circulation currents in the core which generate the magnetic field. The magnetization of rocks has long been known to give evidence for a reversal to the magnetic field rather more often than once in a million years, and the coincidence of falls of iridium with reversals might be thought to support the idea that associated impacts are their cause. Then there is the coincidence of dinosaur extinction with the greatest period of volcanism in the Earth's history; and the occurrence of volcanicism generally in episodic bursts, something an impact theory seems to explain more effectively than the theory of plate tectonics. (The theory of continental drift, powered by slow currents within the mantle, is not itself at issue.) It all hangs together very



The delighted shock of seeing beauty suddenly revealed, which comes out so clearly in the passage from "The Frog King" with which this review opened, may be re-experienced by any child and by many an adult too - who encounters these stories in the welcome new form.



# Ravishment related

Lorna Sage

IAN DONALDSON  
The Rape of Lucretia  
203pp. Oxford University Press.  
£15.00.  
0 19 812638 7

The first thing you notice - as you are meant to - in the plates that illustrate *The Rape of Lucretia*, is that Lucretia is lavishly naked, her ravisher Tarquin elaborately clothed. Thomas Rowlandson's untraditionally undressed Tarquin looks, as Ian Donaldson writes, "curiously, indeed almost risibly, vulnerable and lacking in menace". The myth requires a rapist whose body is concealed, a creature of the shadows (as in Titian's painting), clothed in plush and brecche, his (possibly risible) sex displaced on to the knife with which he threatens the naked innocence of his victim.

It is, of course, a famously voyeuristic effect (Tarquin has his clothes on like us) and one that flatters the male viewer ("had Narcissus seen her", thinks Shakespeare's Tarquin, "Self-love had never drown'd him in the flood"). The slave who obligingly holds the bed-curtain back in several paintings (including Titian's) adds to the squalid implications. Even more so, if you remember that in the story Tarquin threatens Lucretia, if she resists, with not only death, but dishonour: he'll kill the slave too, and swear he found them in flagrante, so that she'll lose her good name for eternity. Which in turn (by making it useless for her to court instant death) gives her the chance to rewrite the plot by publicly killing herself and losing revenge on Tarquin. This, though, is to anticipate Donaldson's account of the narrative's verbal metamorphoses. What the paintings of the rape-scene reveal is that it's a myth about hiddenness - hidden lusts, hidden motives. Again, Shakespeare's poem (itself so interested in painting) spells it out: women, for men, are the exposed, the readable -

Their smoothness, like n goodly champagne plain  
Lays open all the linia wounds that creep:  
To men, as in a rough-grown glove, remain  
Cave-keeping evils.

The human topography of the paintings works like this, with rich expanses of lighted flesh overlying by a violent figure in shadowed and concealing clothes.

Tarquin, though, isn't the only "hidden" man in the story. The transformations Professor Donaldson is tracking through history spring from a myth that in its earliest versions (dating from the first century AD, five hundred years after the supposed event) already enshrined a certain duplicity. Lucretia's tragedy is also the triumph of Lucius Junius Brutus (her husband's friend, and like him related to the Tarquins) who, on witnessing her suicide, swears to drive the princely rapist's father, and the whole race of kings, from Rome. Brutus is a dark horse in several ways he has (in folk-tale motifs) feigned idleness until this moment to avoid political dangers; and he goes on, as Consul, to preside over the execution of his own sons for plotting Royalist treason. Thus Lucretia's story has a further end, and a further beginning.

Donaldson's account of this myth, however, and concentrates first on treatments of the rape and suicide which focus on the heroic woman, and the paradox of strength-in-weakness. Despite her apparent passivity, submissiveness, and self-destruction, Lucretia is the ultimate victor. In companion panels by Cranach, a

Lucretia holds the knife to her breast and a Judith daintily dandles the severed head of Holofernes; a Raimondi engraving makes her lone suicidal figure into a type of Christ, arms spread wide; a splendid Tiepolo rape scene contrives to confuse Tarquin's threatening gesture with Lucretia's later suicide, by intertwining their figures to make it appear that she's already holding the dagger. She becomes a triumphant martyr, achieving her destiny. Donaldson points out that even one of the very few women painters to treat the theme, Artemesia Gentileschi (who had herself, as it happens, been raped by her art teacher), goes along with the conventions. Though if he had juxtaposed Gentileschi's saintly and sexy Lucretia with her Judith, recently on show at the Royal Academy, he might have detected signs of scepticism. In this painting, all the conventionally gratifying ploys are reversed: Judith's maid holds Holofernes down, while her mistress savours at his neck, in a strange, spread-eagle perspective that forces you to wonder, sickeningly, how far off his head is. For Gentileschi, possibly, activity and passivity meant rather different things.

Usually, though, when the paradox of heroic passivity is questioned, it's from quite different angles. Augustine argues that if Lucretia's will did not consent she was guilty until she became guilty of self-murder. Shakespeare's "Rape of Lucretia" arrives at an inspired stalemate by deploying tensions between Christian and pagan attitudes: "irradiate and spotless is my mind", says his Lucretia, but only once she's made up her mind to kill herself. Richardson "solves" the suicide problem - Clarissa, clearly triumphant in her moral victory over her rapist, dies of natural causes. We don't, however, know what they are, end in side-stepping one problem, he's exposed another. Rape is apparently, despite Christianity, still "a lethal act", as Donaldson succinctly puts it. But why? In ancient Rome, he suggests, intercourse with any man other than her husband magically polluted a woman (and indeed her husband and any subsequent children) whether it was voluntary or not. However, from his own account, something like this "magical" theory survives into the eighteenth century and beyond, more than he is prepared to admit.

He stresses "will", though it seems precisely the point of rape that women raped are revealed to be not what they will, but what happens to them: "For men have marble, women waxen minds." When Shakespeare's Lucretia states herself the blood flows into two puddles, one red and clear, the other black, and polluted by Tarquin. She's on the way to becoming flesh of his flesh, or though his sperm has permeated her, Donaldson talks of pregnancy fears, but it's more than that: the woman herself seems in some sense "fathered" by her men - stamped with her husband's (and now Tarquin's) mark as surely as by her father's blood. It's this feeling that makes sense of the silly squabble - "She's mine", "O, mine she is" - between Lucretia's father and husband after her death in Shakespeare's poem. It's a real question whether these most faithful women, from Lucretia to the women of the French Revolution, are souls to call their own, or "mines" to be liberated in death.

In this context the "soulless" jokers are sceptical whom Donaldson rather jolks down on, aren't so much of an enl-tradition after all. Their line tends to be that Lucretia obviously enjoyed it, which is why she killed herself (Gentileschi, Machiavelli, naturally, are prominent here, and so are Restoration libertines. As the epilogue to Southern's *The Fatal Marriage* (1694) has it - "all must own, 'tis most egregious nonsense 'To dye for being pleas'd with a safe conscience."

Who applauded the Chastity of Lucretia (whom all the world now celebrates for a Virtuous Woman) all they made it a subject of private Revenge, and the occasion of the Liberty of Rome?



Tarquin and Lucretia by a mid-seventeenth-century Florentine artist, reproduced from the book review.

Aphra, though, not only casts doubt on Lucretia's chastity, but questions the motive for having her in the story at all, and so returns us to the second man "hidden" in her destiny. Brutus, Lucretia is not only a victim of Tarquin's tyranny, but also, in a sense, of Brutus's revolutionary plot. Machiavelli (who takes this seriously) says the king was driven out, not because his sin had raped Lucretia, but because "he had violated the laws of the kingdom, and ruled tyrannically". The change in perspective, as Donaldson points out, can be seen "in a quite literal sense, in many drawings and paintings".

And so we move openly from "the world of women to the world of men": Brutus, perched with his later namesake (who was thought to be killing his father in killing Caesar) takes over centre stage, as the executioner of his own sons in the name of the Fatherland. It's a myth that is much more useful in France than in England (where every treatment is accompanied by anxious noises off about constitutional monarchy) and its central moral event - the stoical sacrifice of more physical paternity by a father - distances Brutus's story from Lucretia's in a nicely symmetrical way. Again, however, shades of the other story (the woman's story) creep in. (No one would could quite take Madeleine de Scudéry's vision in *Celide* (1654-60), in which

Lucretia and Brutus had been (just) chastely in love, and "he minded not the liberty of Rome, but in order to avenge the death of the innocent Lucretia"; but in many other versions his feelings are displaced on to a wife, and daughters Jacques-Louis David's painting "Lectors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons" (1789-9) is finely described:

At the left the lectors, representatives of the state, move past carrying the bodies of Brutus's sons, as though along a public thoroughfare. Under the ominously darkened figure of Rome Brutus sits tensely and in shadow. . . . On the right of the painting, bunched in quite another light and behaving in quite another manner, are the women of the household: Brutus's wife and daughters. . . . within a single composition David is depicting the tragic separation of two worlds: the private and public worlds, the worlds of men and of women, of duty and of love, of calculation and spontaneity. The worlds are divided as though by an invisible wall. The women's gestures can touch nothing, offer nothing, that the men have already decreed and done. Yet to express a grief that Brutus also shares, the women seem to authenticate in a sense Brutus's humanity. . . .

This change in perspective, though, is fittingly itself "placed" by a final

chapter on the cognate story of the suicide like Lucretia, and a man like Brutus. Cato was not exclusively domestic sensibility, as a plebeian couplet reminds us: "Stoic Cato, the sententious hero, his lady to his friend Horace." Byron reminds us too of the rules of the game which *The Rape of Lucretia* so seductively and seductively depicts. Donaldson brings out the light and darkness, the light and dark messages. He has time for incidental delights, like the "emblem of liberty" who kept Lucretia's fate (sung to death) in his hand, or Quarles's version of Tarquin's fate (sung to death) in his hand, or like other coveting so much ground, in his place, it had, he claims, "always been an ambition to earn my living by my pen. He did not immediately give up even after receiving so precise a preliminary sign as list of having been interested in having speculation on the role of the almighty. The narrative (tales and legends) hides, as it reveals. But why not, after all, would remind me the way the story isn't finished.

## In the patriarch's power

Phyllis Willmott

DALE SPENDER  
Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich  
586pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£10.00. 0 7100 9358 5

In 1848, at the first women's rights convention in the United States, a declaration listed the ways in which women were oppressed. As in Britain, vote, lost their property on marriage, were forced to endure the "double standard" that allowed sexual licence for men but not women, were denied education and (for middle-class women) the right to paid work, and had barely achieved the right to speak freely in public. Modelling their statement on that of the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal" - the history of mankind is a history of the repeated violations and usurpations on its part toward women, having as its direct object the establishment of its absolute tyranny over her."

In her search to "recover" the lives and work of the many women from

Western societies who, over 300 years, fought against the oppression of their sex, Dale Spender has collected a mass of shocking evidence of what men did to keep women under their yoke for so long. It was not just during the fight for the vote that the myth of men's achivalty was exposed. Many were the spirited and valiant women that this book brings to life who paid as high a price as the suffragettes for their "outrageous" claims to full humanity.

From the time of Aphra Behn onwards men, when challenged by women to treat them as equals, responded with aggression and hostility. That is to say men did. Throughout history, on the evidence of this book (although the author does her best to conceal this), there were clearly some men who did not. Yet, perhaps as a deliberate act of revenge for the cruelties of the past, the author goes out of her way to belittle any positive help given by men in the long struggle for women's rights. There is also an explicit intention, by ignoring men, to demonstrate what it is like to be made "invisible" as women so often have, been in the past and still sometimes are.

To read a book flawed as this one is by much hostile polemic demands endurance as well as the capacity to tolerate its related and exasperating weaknesses. It is much too long, and massive amount of material, although

obviously painstakingly gathered, been inadequately digested and organized. It suffers from the belief that a rigorous research is a "masculine" activity, rejected as another oppression of the patriarchal society.

If challenged, Dale Spender probably not deny everything the Women's Movement demanded in 1848 has been demanded, and that it would, fortunately, now to put the clock back. Nothing has changed. She is impression that only a revolution ever put things right. So she remains "patriarchal" and "masculine" in her own right, and her own women, she believes, are essentially subservient to men, ever at risk of exploitation. The thread of the argument is rational "stolen" from history, "stolen" from the past, practically everything that is not away with excluding that it included the oppression of bodies; and that outlasting of all times - including the times of women's ideas and women's movements - is the truth, if not all, of this is true, presented with too much a tolerance, its related and exasperating weaknesses. It is much too long, and massive amount of material, although

BYRON GUINNESS  
Popcorn from the Thirties  
176pp. Cygnus Press, Burford.  
Oxford. £9.50.  
0 907435 01 7

HOWARD JAMES  
Swans Reflecting Elephants:  
My Early Years  
Edited by George Melly  
Widenfeld and Nicolson.  
£11.95

By Guinness, that life-enhancing way of old Liffey, it could be said, in the hard-slang of one of its competitors, that it refreshes those parts of the arts either brewers do not seem to care. This was so even before the Thirties made the excellent choice (though I was sorry to see that, unlike his French opposite number, he failed to visit the Frankfurt Book Fair) for her Minister in charge of the department concerned with them, of someone whose mother was a Guinness heiress and whose wife was formerly married to a Guinness heir. Both the books here under review can be catalogued as of Guinness provenance, the first direct, being a selective reminiscence of Lord Moyne, and the second indirect, being a somewhat surreal transcription of some somewhat surreal reminiscences of a very different *filio-a-papa-riche*, yet one no less given to Art and its patronage, typed, over a four-and-a-half day luncheon course, in the Irish home of Lord Moyne's son Desmond Guinness (the prize-winning protector of Eire's Gaelic heritage) by that roustabout old schoolmaster and Anglo-Saxon Al Nelson, George Melly.

This *Popcorn* is Lord Moyne's second go at describing bits of what he modestly but not untruthfully calls "pre-ventil life" - not that lives need be inevitable to become works of art in themselves. At Oxford he had "edited Orwell and gadded about with a lot of talented friends" - many of whom have also written about themselves and themselves been written about - and like other over-graduate journalists before and since, he had, he claims, "always been an ambition to earn my living by my pen. He did not immediately give up even after receiving so precise a preliminary sign as list of having been interested in having speculation on the role of the almighty. The narrative (tales and legends) hides, as it reveals. But why not, after all, would remind me the way the story isn't finished.

Like many very rich people, brought up to look after their pennies while their fructifying millions look after themselves, he seems to get easily upset about small sums, as when with uncharacteristic annoyance he notes in his 1936 diary that a lady who had borrowed from him roubles worth considerably less than a pound on the train to Leningrad from Riga (that man-spired Baltic city where I once knew much happiness, for which I felt strong nostalgia reading his account of a stay there on his second honeymoon) had paid, a full twenty-four hours later, not repaid the sum to his Leningrad hotel. And yet the exemplary generosity of his patronage of literature and his poorer votaries, conducted always by stealth, gets no mention in his pages, unless, as is possible, a passing reference, as "the heroically determined editor of *Adam*", where some of the author's work has appeared, points to him as a beneficiary. The Dante type in which the justly renowned Curwen Press has set his nicely margined book of Cygnus is a delight, and of the fifteen glorious mistakes I spotted in the text of a careless compositor, the rest, unless he is an incorrigibly rotten speller (I must say I have never yet seen *Koebler* spelled *Coll-Hase*), being presumably the result of his drooping off again while reading his proofs. Evelyn Waugh would have been surprised to see his old enemy Hugh Molson translated into "Hot-Lunch Johnson" as to see the Rhine made to flow from North to South. And one may wonder, a little at what Lady Moseley may have thought about his

sometimes makes one want to cry. "Pray you, undo more than just the last button on your waistcoat." Half a century after the "shattering experience" of the breakup by Sir Oswald Mosley of his first marriage to a blue-eyed blonde teenager snatched from the nest of what he calls "the mocking-bird Mitford", for whom his passion had Stendhalianly "crystallized" across the Albert Hall during a concert, one can still see his heart's oyster cringing from the bitter lemon-juice of his memories of the mistaken certainty of living happily ever after in surroundings that at the outset could be described as both affluent and "Society". They find "agreeable and smug friends" in how he puts it, Sir Harold Acton, like a good Florentine pastry-cook, preferred to squeeze out much more sugar-icing than that, calling their London home "a delightful trying place of the generations where past and future consorted merrily with the present". Poor Peter Quennell, self-confessedly amorously bewitched by young Mrs Guinness, reported, almost in the language of the advertising agency for which he was then working, that its "drawing room had the luxurious quietude with which the very rich surround themselves". Evelyn Waugh, a much more intimate *ami de la maison*, urged the novelist Henry Green to share his own platonic admiration for Diana Guinness, writing that "She seems to me the one encouraging figure in this generation - particularly now she is pregnant - a great germinating vat of potentiality like the vats I saw at their brewery"; a potentiality realized, as it were, in part after many years by her becoming the fourth-best writer of the Milford family. Bryan Guinness, on suffering the same cold and abandonment endured a few years earlier by Waugh, would have agreed only with the part of what Waugh had written of his experience at the time: "There is practically no part of one that is not injured when a thing like this happens but naturally vanity is one of the things one is most generally conscious of - or so I find." Moyne has in all things led a life wholly free of vanity, even if his estimate of his own life has usually been more generous than that of the critics, even those critics who, like Desmond MacCarthy, were his friends. Of a play of his reproduced in *Popcorn*, a somewhat indigestible Clinckschnecker, rightly judged by MacCarthy to have "inched dramatic tension", he characteristically writes that "it was not for me to have confidence in its success but only in its merits".

All the same there are enough interesting anecdotes (including a charming one of Winston Churchill suddenly getting down on all fours beneath the Chartwell dining-room table and shaking the swimming-pool water out of his ears like a dog) and animal-drawings in this peculiar volume to make it, if not a work of art, a worthwhile addition to the coral reef of *petites histoires* without which history proper can never be satisfactorily written. The same can even be said of *Swans Reflecting Elephants*, despite the nearly 120 easily avoidable gaffes and floaters that mar its not so many more pages, making it, I am sorry to say, nothing less than a disgrace to British publishing, of which the disastrous decline in editing, proof-reading and printing standards is nowhere more glaringly demonstrated than at the Frankfurt Book Fair, where it may be compared with its competing exhibitors from ninety-one nations, few of whom (and certainly none from Western Europe or the US) would have delivered such a book in its present state to the booksellers - who a few decades ago even in England would have refused to handle anything so chock-a-block with misprints (Hatchard's, for example, rejected the original edition of Evelyn Waugh's *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* for much lesser offences in this respect). Nor is it likely to be given the corrective cosmetic surgery at present being practised at considerable expense - for subsequent impressions - on the consequent corrupt text of the same publishers' *Norman Parkinson* no less, of the dining-room of James's grand, Magritte-decorated Wimpole Street house captioned "Igor Markevitch, with Tilly holding someone else's baby, and Edward", when the very minimum of research could have established that the lady in question is Vasilva Nijinsky's then still very pretty daughter Kira holding her own son (and Edward James's grandson), the very Vasilva Markevitch who had never, until I recently showed him, seen this cosy scene from his forgotten childhood. Countless reference books exist in show that Dianne Menulink's *George Weidenfeld, himself* sometimes says. When the strike-bound Sir William Rees-Mogg ordered a dummy *Times* to be set in Frankfurt as a contingency measure, he found that it had been faithfully composed and corrected by two elderly German ladies. Perhaps our by now ageing and all too Anglicized Baron would be well advised to recruit a couple of just such ladies the next time he attends the Fair in the city of Goethe and Rothschild.

West Dean Park were lately illustrated in the TLS, November 26, whose lover he had long been, spoke with great affection of James but wondered how he had ever allowed himself to be recruited saying such disingenuous things in so slipshodly produced a book. How could he ever have supposed that he would not be made a monkey of by the gold-digging Tilly? As a boy, too, he had bleated so much in public about Lord Harcourt's groping him that that pathetic politician had committed suicide, which was hardly cricket, and had made James a bad name with homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. As for his divorce, he should have conformed to the custom of the day whereby a husband, however innocent, always sacrificed himself in court as the "guilty party", a convenient English hypocrisy. He agreed with Peter Quennell that in all other ways James had "cut an extravagant, useful, lush" as a generous patron and friend and one who certainly merited better than this "extraordinary array of misprints" and "weighty succession of obvious howlers" (Quennell, a Weidenfeld author, *scripsit*). Though I myself emphatically reject the view more than once stated in the *Bookseller*, the principal organ of the British book trade, that it is no part of their contributors' business or that of the reviewers whom they are so fond of criticizing to draw attention to misprints, I cannot cite here more than a few from the long list I have made. Turning, by old habit of childhood, first of all to the illustrations, I was surprised to see a photograph, by Norman Parkinson no less, of the dining-room of James's grand, Magritte-decorated Wimpole Street house captioned "Igor Markevitch, with Tilly holding someone else's baby, and Edward", when the very minimum of research could have established that the lady in question is Vasilva Nijinsky's then still very pretty daughter Kira holding her own son (and Edward James's grandson), the very Vasilva Markevitch who had never, until I recently showed him, seen this cosy scene from his forgotten childhood. Countless reference books exist in show that Dianne Menulink's *George Weidenfeld, himself* sometimes says. When the strike-bound Sir William Rees-Mogg ordered a dummy *Times* to be set in Frankfurt as a contingency measure, he found that it had been faithfully composed and corrected by two elderly German ladies. Perhaps our by now ageing and all too Anglicized Baron would be well advised to recruit a couple of just such ladies the next time he attends the Fair in the city of Goethe and Rothschild.

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# Allowing for God's intervention

James Barr

WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM

Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism  
222pp. Oxford University Press.  
£13.50.  
019 826665 0

Lord Dacre of Glanton, we are told in William J. Abraham's book, has asserted that, since the New Testament told of a resurrection, its writers could have believed anything, and since they would believe anything, nothing they say can be relied on. And he is only one among many other thinkers about history who have insisted or implied that history leaves no room for miracles, resurrections and the like. Taken together, such views form a massive threat to the idea of special divine intervention in the world. The David who here steps forward to meet this Goliath is a young philosophical theologian from Northern Ireland. The stone that he flings into the sling is classical Christian theism. The stone whistles clearly through the air. The giant falls. The Philistines flee.

Actually, the Philistines present at this encounter belong to two different tribes. The first consists not so much of historians as of theologians of history like Troeltsch and Van Harvey who have attempted to work out the principles of historical judgment in a way that would be relevant to theological problems and who have found that traditional religious ideas of divine intervention could not be fitted into its framework. The second tribe consists of theologians themselves, in so far as they have come to think that our ideas of divine action or divine intervention may have to be modified. What if Christianity can get along without miracles anyway? What if the incarnation is a myth, through which the relation between God and man is expressed, rather than the statement of a factually existing reality?

Such are the subjects here discussed. In a neat series of eight chapters: divine revelation in relation to divine speaking; to miracles and to incarnation; divine action and to mythology; divine intervention in relation to analogy; to historical warrants; to metaphysics; and to natural science. On all these points the author reasons for the integrity and satisfactoriness of classical theism; and he argues philosophically against all positions that suppose historical and scientific knowledge to have knocked holes in it. As against the theologians of history he argues that history should not be so construed as to exclude the possibility of special divine revelatory action and intervention; and as against the theologians he argues that theism loses its integrity and solidity if these elements are qualified or removed.

As a piece of purely philosophical discussion about the problem of divine intervention as an element in theistic belief all this is quite well done. Indeed, that is what Dr Abraham should have entitled his book: "The Philosophical Problem of Divine Intervention" or something like that. When he begins to attach his argument

to historical criticism, things begin to go wrong. For the book makes little or no effort to consider what actually happens in the historical criticism of the Bible. If one reads the numerous "introductions" to the Bible which contain the quintessence of historical criticism and its results, one finds that they contain, on the whole, nothing of the sort of thing that the author is talking about. Nowhere do they tell us that miracles cannot happen or that resurrections cannot be believed in. What they offer us is above all literary information, literary history and views of the development of religious tradition out of which our biblical books have come. Denials of miracles, resurrections and incarnation are conspicuously lacking. The reason why historical criticism came to be so widely accepted in the churches and so successful is precisely because it was realized that it did not entail the denial of any of these things. In the Church of England, for example, *Lux Mundi*, the collection of essays edited by Charles Gore and published in 1889, a book which most vigorously asserted the centrality of incarnation, was also the book which most ensured the acceptance of biblical criticism. In other words, biblical criticism has by and large agreed with Dr Abraham. Whatever Troeltsch or Van Harvey may have said, they have not spoken for the main trend of historical criticism or been followed by it; practice has been different from the theory, or at least from this form of it. Perhaps, of course, biblical critics ought to have agreed with those theologians and been influenced by them more than has been the case. It would be paradoxical if this book, by persuading us that we had to take them more seriously as guides than we have done. For all these reasons, anyway, as an approach to the question of historical criticism this book is seriously misdirected.

Concentrating almost entirely on the theoretical side, on the philosophy and theology of the matter, the author gives little or no guidance to the practical historian. He appears to admit that the historian may consider matters of divine intervention to lie outside his province. If that is so, then presumably a history of the first century AD can be written without the historian being required to state that the miraculous incarnation of God in a particular man, took place in such and such a year. What Abraham insists is that the divine intervention must not be extended and allowed to become the dogmatic assertion that such divine intervention cannot take place at all. In other words, he is not much interested in how history is written; he is interested in ensuring that the historian, in writing it, does not have a "naturalistic metaphysics" hidden away in his mind. But, as far as this concerns biblical criticism, far from setting limits to it, he is simply confirming what is already normal, at least among those biblical scholars (surely the great majority) who are religious believers.

But this has an effect on the validity of his philosophical argument too. For it raises the question whether the theologians and other theoretics whom Abraham opposes really hold their views for the reasons that he imagines. I very much doubt whether anyone here mentioned really holds that naturalistic metaphysics; the author does not demonstrate that they do. The bogey of naturalism is more something in his own mind: if people go too far in the wrong direction he thinks this must be the reason, but he does not really produce evidence that they hold it. There have of course been biblical scholars who were out-and-out naturalists, explaining Jesus' walking on the water on the grounds that he was really walking on a wooden plank or an underwater reef or even on the shore itself. But in the present century such explanations have been wildly abnormal. Modern biblical critics would regard them as ludicrous. Indeed, where such explanations still appear, they come mainly from religiously conservative people, for whom the factual inerrancy of the biblical narrative is more important than the miraculous character of the event. The theologians here discussed, like Jobo Hick and Maurice Wiles, whether their views are right or wrong, probably do not hold them for the reasons that the author supposes, because modern science and history do not leave room for divine revelation and intervention. To a much greater extent they think what they do think for reasons internal to the structure of Christian faith. For instance, they think that the coherence of Christianity, along with the nature of the biblical evidence and other factors, makes it more proper to consider incarnation as "mythological" in character. It is the coherence of Christianity that moves them also in the direction in which they go.

The acceptance of supernatural intervention may produce more difficulties for classical theism than appears at first sight. I have just by chance been reading J. N. Westwood's *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History 1812-1900*. On p. 219 I find the sentence: "It is still difficult to rule out the existence in Russia of powers, or properties, or senses, ordinarily unknown to man." Now I have no idea whether Westwood is a classical theist or not; but it seems that he has not read his Troeltsch, or has failed to take in the latter's assurances that history has no room for this analogy-loss behaviour. Now if Rasputin can get into the history books with a few veritable miracles, then surely Jesus can too. But of course that is just the trouble. For, reversing the same argument, letting Jesus in this way

means letting Rasputin in also. But the classical theist does not really want Rasputin to get in. For if Rasputin can get in, the only effect is to diminish the degree of conviction carried by the miracles of Jesus. Allowing miracle to be possible does not really solve the problem. It makes the familiar world known to us through analogy with normal events; there are supernatural agents about and once in a while they do something quite abnormal; but, this being allowed for, it remains pretty much the same world.

Here is another way to think of it. The author gives no guidance about the practical procedure of the historian. He does not volunteer to rewrite Volume Ten of the *Cambridge Ancient History* so as to include an account of the incarnation as a historical event. So long as we do not exclude miracle, resurrection and incarnation by a naturalistic assumption, it seems that we can go on as we are doing. But this must mean that miracle, incarnation and resurrection, as elements in the actual fact of historical writing, are of comparatively slight weight. As part of the historical description of the first century AD, it seems that they do not compare with the disaster of Varus or with the Jewish War. So, even without divine intervention in fact, this must mean that it takes a form that is in some sense veiled in its relation to historical factuality and ponderability. But, once we perceive this, we may see that the Hick/Wiles sort of opinion is not so far from grasping with the realities of revelation after all.

This brings us back to literary questions again. Historical criticism does indeed make a great deal of difference to the theological questions under discussion here, and not because it lays down or assumes what can or cannot happen but because it casts a different light on what the biblical writers thought and why. Our knowledge about these matters comes almost entirely from the Bible; and the way in which the Bible describes these matters, and the reasons why it does so, are very important aspects of the material. Biblical criticism offered new suggestions about the ways in which narratives had developed, about the motives with which they were told and about the mental structures of the ancient world within which these narratives had meaning. It is these considerations that bear heavily on the debates about incarnation and the like, and on those grounds that progress, one way or the other, can perhaps be made. In this respect the philosophical reassertion of classical theism, with its traditional intellectual parameters and

definitions, seems simply to bypass the question of the meaning of the Bible.

Doubts may be raised about a philosophical discussion about the nature of its clarity and equanimity. Examples follow. The meaning of "revelation" has its origin in the age of "Smith reveals himself in this or that". The author does not merely insist, that this is the historical usage of the term, the one in which it first learned to use it as part of a language. But of course it is not. A philosopher is quite entitled to use a term in a way that is quite different from its historical use. But if he is not to be misunderstood, he must learn as a child to use the word in the linguistic, and there is no sign that the author has looked into the matter. He seriously looked into the antecedents of the term "revelation" within two languages of the Bible. A second example is the argument from the analogy of the Fall. Man has come to be considered mythological rather than historical in fact, and that the incarnation might be considered analogically. After this Abraham argues that the "scientific scientific theory" of the "carefully collected evidence" of the idea of the Fall. I do not see why this should be accepted. There is well be specific scientific evidence against a completely literal reading of the Fall, even against the idea that it occurred in a certain definite place and to a unique human pair who were the ancestors of all humans. But assuming that the circumstances were not to be maintained, and assuming therefore that the story is repeated applying to all mankind, it is not clear that there is any scientific evidence against the Fall. Indeed it would be easy to argue that there is scientific evidence for the reality of the Fall (though not for the details of the story of it) than there is for the factuality of the incarnation. The question is not whether or not there is any scientific evidence against the Fall, but whether biblical stories contain evidence of factuality or not, in either case, with what intention.

Abraham represents much of the best in the evangelical tradition: he seeks to speak from within the tradition, and in this he succeeds. But his thinking is reminiscent, so this I think from the actuality of modern scholarship rather than from the adjustment, once the case has been seen, should be entirely possible.

known as "Woodbine Willie" was the only longform most Englishmen had ever heard of.

## Woodbine Willie at work

Ken Leech

GERALD STUDDERT-KENNEDY

Dog-Collar Democracy: The Industrial Christian Fellowship, 1919-1929  
228pp. Macmillan. £20.  
0 333 29190 5

Industrial Fellowship of a national movement called Church Action with the Unemployed brought to the attention of many people the fact that local churches and the national institutional Church were heavily involved in industrial and employment issues. The recent initiative needs to be seen against a wider background of the growth of "industrial mission", the priest-worker movement and so on, movements which have developed particularly since the 1950s. Amid this mass of activity, little mention is made of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, based a few hundred yards from Aldgate in the City of London. Yet, as Gerald Studdert-Kennedy's book shows, this was when the ICF was a powerful force in the Church, and who its Messenger, the author's namesake, G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, was the best-known clergyman in Britain. Archbishop Temple once claimed that Studdert-Kennedy, widely

known as "Woodbine Willie", was the only longform most Englishmen had ever heard of.

Dog-Collar Democracy examines the ICF and Studdert-Kennedy's role within it in the crucial years 1919 to 1929. The ICF came into existence as a result of the merger of the Christian Social Union, founded by Scott Holland in 1889, and the evangelical Navy Mission Society, founded in 1877. The CSU had run out of steam by 1910, and more radical movements such as the Church Socialist League were taking over. Studdert-Kennedy, in spite of his radical image, was no socialist. Indeed, one of the interesting achievements of this study is the demolition of some of the stories which have grown up about the Messenger, some of which entered mythology at an early stage. (Father Adderley, in the *Church Times* of 1924, was listing Studdert-Kennedy along with Headlam, Donaldson and others, as a Christian Socialist.) As the author says, "the myth of his social radicalism has persisted". Indeed, the Dean of Westminster in 1929 refused to consider allowing him to be buried in the Abbey on the grounds of his alleged socialism.

In fact, Studdert-Kennedy had protested that if any of the ICF activities had fallen under the control of socialists, he would sever his connection with it at once. "I am not a

socialist," he wrote on November 1926, "and spend a considerable amount of my time exposing the Socialist clap-net. While I am a Socialist, I am a Christian Socialist, and he attacked Darwinism, Marxism and egalitarianism. "There is no more utterly devoid of truth than the lie of the equality of man," he wrote in 1921. His most extreme, and abusive, language was reserved for Marx, though there is no evidence that he understood his writings at all.

Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, the limited success of the ICF and the background and attitudes of its Council and supporters, led by the clergy in the ICF were often trained and affected by the movement pioneered by Milford and Kellogg, but the class base of the ICF was what emerges from this detailed and somewhat ponderous, study. A picture of a fairly established movement ("the occasional puff of the political sulphur released by the ICF itself was palpably a stage effect," wrote a passionate, caring priest who was in human suffering the form of Divine. "It is a pity that the ICF has not been at times felt driven to make certain concessions to the fallen state, poverty and chastity are not forms of life, they are conditions of life, they are not to be commanded. Yet even in the ICF, tradition is very strong. The ICF is about as itself seems to be."

## PHILOSOPHY

### Elective antinomies

Mary Warnock

ALASTAIR HANNAY

Kierkegaard  
385pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£14.95.  
07100 9190 7

This book is one of a series entitled *The Arguments of the Philosophers*, edited by Ted Honderich of London University. The purpose of the series is to go through the works of various philosophers at some length, setting out, analysing and to some extent evaluating their thought. In this historical context, on the one hand, the books will be intended to be read by students; but they are also intended to be read by the general public as well. The enterprise is in general obviously worth while wherever it deals with a philosopher whose writings are diffuse, scattered or difficult to get hold of in this country. On these grounds it is certainly useful to include Kierkegaard in the series.

But it has to be said that the great difficulty for all the authors of the series has been to achieve a balance between detailed exposition and a broader critical appraisal of the general relevance of the author in question, the balance, that is, between the trees and the wood. And the problem for Alastair Hannay must have been especially acute.

In a sense, the outline of Kierkegaard's thought is clear enough. It followed the outline of his life. He was deeply influenced by the religious gloom and guilt of his father. When he was a young man he hoped to have shaken off this influence, and, for a time, he lived for pleasure, the life and soul of numerous parties. He became engaged to be married. He was converted to the concept of morality. He broke off his engagement. He was converted to Christianity, and to an even more intense religious life, where the central demands of morality and duty were recognized.

possibly give; indeed Lutherans argued that it is a metaphysical impossibility to do more than is commanded by God. This elasticity of "duty", its contraction in one theory and expansion in another, is one of the most important facts about ethics. It signals two radically different approaches to the subject, each of which has a very great deal to be said for it. On the one side of contraction are deep, ineradicable facts about human nature. There is only so much that one can demand from the normal human frame; it is no good saying *ought* to someone who can reasonably reply *can't*. Moreover, guilt and blame have a useful role as the wages of failing in "duty", and if we made a duty out of every act that, on balance, made people better off, then guilt and blame would be constantly with us and consequently ignored. "Duty", we are therefore inclined to conclude, must be contracted.

But then we feel the tug in the opposite direction. Where do we draw the line? I have, everyone agrees, a duty to aid my children. But my third cousins too? I have, everyone also agrees, a duty to help a stranger in great need. But how great must his need be and how little may my cost be? It is hard to find a really satisfying reason for drawing a line anywhere. And is a contracted account of duty going to be adequate? Duties to people arise from jobs (that of doctor, for instance), relationships (parent, greengrocer [contractors and promises]). If we stopped there, we should, to be sure, have a contracted conception of duty. But we should also have no answers to most of the questions that constitute the modern preoccupation of moral philosophy. So we should have to add at least duties that arise from other people's rights and from their

there was nevertheless a myth of naturalism, a humanist illusion. The religious stage of life entailed a final recognition of the necessarily transcendent nature of human endeavour. Each individual, Kierkegaard held, was inevitably concerned with his own supreme happiness. By adopting Christianity, he chose to interpret this goal, his own ultimate happiness, from the standpoint of faith. To adopt this standpoint was to recognize subjectivity. There is no truth except that recognized and accepted by the individual; there is no real morality except that to which an individual can commit himself, for himself alone.

Such an outline is relatively clear. For the most part Kierkegaard wrote with the missionary intent of freeing his readers from illusion. But in expounding his thought for this particular series, Professor Hannay has to face the question whether, thinking as he did, Kierkegaard was a philosopher at all. Worse still, perhaps what he chiefly relied on were not arguments but unquestioned convictions. "The Arguments of the Philosophers" may seem a remote and inept heading under which to write. Kierkegaard never alluded to question the Christian faith. He was someone of the centre of whose thought is the necessity of a leap of faith, who believes that to attempt to justify faith is to misunderstand its nature, who holds that, for faith to exist, its object must be contradiction and paradox... how can such a person be held to engage in philosophy? If philosophers enjoy reading Kierkegaard, they must surely do so only when they are on a subliminal leave. For Kierkegaard the great enemy was objectivity, which he identified with scientific or any other form of systematic thought; and it is hardly to be expected, therefore, that he himself should proceed systematically or even consistently. The difficulties in constructing a wood of decently discernible slings and shots out of the given trees might seem insurmountable.

In his attempt to show that Kierkegaard used real arguments rather than mere random insights, Hannay is less than successful. This is largely because of the obscurity of his own style and presentation. The reader lurches grip on what would count as an argument. It is rather like reading the

epistles of St Paul; words like "therefore" and "whereas" abound, but it is less than clear what their connective function actually is.

But perhaps the most interesting parts of the book, apart from the extensive quotations from Kierkegaard himself, are those in which Hannay discusses the question whether Kierkegaard is to be counted as a philosopher. He is not, as Hannay rightly says, a philosopher of religion. He is not, that is to say, concerned with general questions about the nature of religion, nor with possible proofs of the existence of God. He wrote on the assumption that, not religion in general, but Christianity in particular, contained the only truth, and offered the only goal for someone who was concerned with how he should live. It is on the question of good that he tangled with philosophy. In so far as he specifically rejected the ethical stage of life, Kierkegaard offered a challenge to any moral philosophy that attempts to provide a non-theological foundation for morals.

Just as, if we read the works of Bishop Butler, we are offered an account of the good man's life subject to the guidance of conscience which ultimately makes no sense unless conscience is seen to derive its authority from God, so Kierkegaard's account of a moral imperative cannot be understood except in the context of Christianity. One of his most powerful illustrations is in fact derived from Judaism, but its force is transferred to Christianity: the imperative which commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was the voice of God. Of course, as Sartre later argued, Abraham had to choose to interpret the voice as God's voice; but to do so was to take the step into faith. For he, Abraham, could not foresee the outcome of his act, an act against which, at the level of human morality, he would have revolted. He simply had to trust that there existed a higher morality than any that he could understand. (Hannay. Incidentally makes rather heavy weather of the use to which this story is put in *Fear and Trembling*.)

From a strictly philosophical point of view, then, Kierkegaard's significance, like Butler's, is that he forces the moral philosopher to think again about the effectiveness of his own proposed foundations for morality, whether these are utilitarian,

Kantian-rationalist or themselves the outcome of intuition. The comparison with Kant, pursued at some length by Hannay, is of particular interest. Kant, as much as Kierkegaard, held that the moral imperative was issued to each individual separately. But he also argued that, as an imperative of reason, it was of its nature universally applicable, not valid for the individual alone also valid for all. Just as I myself, and for myself, see that, if it is greater than b, and b is greater than c, then a is greater than c; and yet, having seen it, I know that this rule will apply, regardless of circumstances or of persons universally; so, according to Kant, the moral law, being a rational law, was both "seen" by the individual, and was known to apply universally. And that a moral imperative should be universalizable seems to be at the heart of what we understand universally as the appeal of a moral imperative. (It seems wholly natural to treat "x is morally wrong" as equivalent to "no one ought to x".) How can Kierkegaard, then, insisting as he does on the individual's own receptiveness to the command, and his own interpretation of it, account for the universal "feel" of a command that is moral? He cannot have recourse, as Kant has, to the supposed fact that reason is shared equally by all "rational creatures", with whom alone Kant is concerned, for reason has been ruled out from true morality. It sometimes seems that he cannot account for it at all, except by saying that, for someone who has entered the religious stage of life, what he must do will be revealed to him; and since it will be revealed as a command from God, it must be presumed in some sense to have a timeless, absolute and universal validity, even if, like the command to kill Isaac, it does not appear to have any validity at all. At other times, Kierkegaard tangles more directly with the contrast between what we may think of as ordinary duties, of a social or neighbourly kind, and the deep inner duties deriving from a commitment to the subjectivity of religion.

Hannay's discussion of these several aspects of Kierkegaard's thought is full of interest. But in the last resort we must perhaps admit that Kierkegaard offers us no complete solution to the paradox of conscience: that it is supposed to be unique to the individual, and yet that its dictates seem to have universal applicability. Indeed it may be that he does not even want to solve this paradox. If there were no paradoxes there would be no faith. And, more than this, he presents the ability to embark on the voyage of faith as the supreme and only test of the integrity of the individual. Therefore faith, and its paradoxical content, must at all costs be preserved. To succumb to objectivity, whether to the acceptance of scientific systems, or to the acceptance of generally received moral opinions, is to lose your own self. In *Sickness unto Death* he says "The greatest danger, that of losing oneself, may pass off in the world as if it was nothing; every other loss, an arm, leg, five dollars, a wife etc. is bound to be noticed." It is perhaps in his expression of hankering for *truth to oneself*, in whatever sense this mysterious phrase may be interpreted, that Kierkegaard's appeal lies. And, if so, we may stop wondering whether or not he is to rate, in some eternal grading system, as philosopher or not. But, for what it is worth, we may say, in a quite different form, an expression of the very same hankering in Bernard Williams' rejection of Utilitarianism in favour of an ideal of personal integrity.

It is a continuing romantic ideal. Hegel, before Kierkegaard, had rejected the religious phase of thought as childish. It was, he argued, the phase in which people yearned for truth and fulfilment, but had not yet understood that truth was to be found, not in myth, but in reason. Once the philosopher emerged into the pure realm of reason, then he would see that he was himself to be identified with, and was the source of, the pure abstract universal idea. One may regard Hegel's idea of reason as itself a kind of mythology, and one which may ultimately have authoritarian consequences, inimical to the autonomy of the individual. If so, then the myth of the Kierkegaardian solitary, wrestling with his god and with his conscience, is more attractive, as well as more compelling. And if, in the end, Alastair Hannay cannot entirely explain the attraction of this myth, we should not be surprised. For part of the appeal of Kierkegaard is the strong impression he gives that he is struggling to express something inexpressible, yet intimately known. It is, after all, only religion, but philosophy itself which sometimes seems to engage in this struggle.

Can we do any better, he asks in the closing lines of the book? Can we have "proof" in moral philosophy? The word "proof" is too vague to quarrel over. But there is much more that can be done. Heyd would doubtless admit that his own positive proposals about a commanding *ought*, each of us free to pursue his own ends, checked only by a limited set of duties to others. But this is only to sketch out his unqualified supererogatorism, not to justify it.

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Heyd has chosen to concentrate on one fairly small part of morality. He has written a good book that will probably be the best start for a study of supererogation for some time to come. But it is no more than a start. Its focus is microscopic, whereas the justification of anything important in moral philosophy - and justification is what Heyd is after - requires the macroscopic view. The microscope is, as Heyd shows, a good way to spot questions. But it is no way to find answers.

## The whole duty of man

James Griffin

DAVID HEYD

Supererogation  
310pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£14.  
0 521 23935 4

Philosophers and theologians use the technical term "supererogatory" of any act that is morally admirable yet not morally required. Supererogation, in other words, is what lies beyond the call of duty.

As obvious category, one might think, yet the strange thing is that philosophers and theologians have the devil of a time finding a place for it. And the reason is not hard to find: it requires a particular, rather narrow conception of duty, and if a moral philosophy (Aristotle's for instance) simply does not employ that conception or lets that conception expand to fill the whole moral space, then everything morally desirable is that some sort of duty (Kant's for instance), supererogation becomes redundant. More than half of David Heyd's book is devoted to an excellent historical survey of the striking feature of which is how few philosophers could fit supererogation into their scheme of things even if they wanted to. There is a noteworthy exception. Christian thinkers at times felt driven to make certain concessions to the fallen state, poverty and chastity are not forms of life, they are conditions of life, they are not to be commanded. Yet even in the ICF, tradition is very strong. The ICF is about as itself seems to be.

needs. But it is very difficult to give any satisfactory account of either rights or needs without bringing in human goods in a way that forces the conception of duty to expand. "Duty", we are inclined to conclude, must be expanded.

It may seem that the way out of this impasse is quite simple. We could, of course, duty depends upon capacity, and that while tutism or saintliness is not duty for ordinary mortals it is for those who are up to them. Or we could say as many modern utilitarians do, that although there are good reasons in terms of benefits and harms for making our duties endlessly demanding, there are even stronger reasons of the same sort for putting some limit on them. Both compromises leave a space, of sorts, for supererogation.

However, the second part of this book is devoted to arguing that these compromises, which Heyd calls "qualified supererogatorism", will not do, and that supererogation must be "unqualified", by which he means that supererogation has to be found a place among the primitives of moral theory and not defined in terms of a set of basic concepts that omit it. He is out, he says, to justify unqualified supererogationism.

How can he do it? He uses a now common method of argument that may be called piecemeal appeal to intuition. He works out certain consequences of opposing theories; he then produces intuitions (that is to say, commonsense views about morality) that conflict with them; and then from these negative results he reaches his own positive conclusion. Now intuitions are appealed to in practically all departments of thought - in the natural sciences, in mathematics, in other

branches of philosophy. But what is striking is that in all these cases appeal to intuition is treated as only tentative, not at all authoritative, stop that needs to be accompanied by hard work. And this is certainly right. All sorts of intuitions have turned out wrong. If intuitions are not worth much in other departments of thought, they are worth no more in moral philosophy.

Heyd is aware of this objection and in his final chapter, which must be one of the most illuminating discussions of supererogation that we have, seeks to meet it. He grants the objection some, but to my mind not enough, weight. What if someone says that our intuitions about supererogation are just wrong? he asks. "The way to answer, he correctly observes, is to offer a wider view of the nature of duty... and of the moral good." The crux of the matter is the concept of duty, in particular the extent to which the impartiality at the heart of morality requires us to sacrifice ourselves for others. It all boils down to such questions as: will an ethics centred on a contracted conception of duty be adequate? Can such a theory be developed in a way that will allow it to supply the answers that we want from a moral theory without appealing to a notion of human good that will turn duty into the expanded conception?

The answers to these questions are far from obvious, and can be given only by providing a fairly fully developed moral theory that explains not only supererogation but also everything else that needs explaining. But can Heyd supply a whole moral theory in a

slender final chapter? No; nor does he try. He attempts something much more modest. He notes that to judge some state of affairs *good* is to make an impersonal judgment, and that to judge that someone *ought* to do a certain act is to establish a link with a person or group and so, in this sense, personal. Therefore, *good*, he concludes, cannot constitute a ground for a commanding *ought*; each of us is free to pursue his own ends, checked only by a limited set of duties to others. But this is only to sketch out his unqualified supererogatorism, not to justify it.

Can we do any better, he asks in the closing lines of the book? Can we have "proof" in moral philosophy? The word "proof" is too vague to quarrel over. But there is much more that can be done. Heyd would doubtless admit that his own positive proposals about a commanding *ought*, each of us free to pursue his own ends, checked only by a limited set of duties to others. But this is only to sketch out his unqualified supererogatorism, not to justify it.

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## Chenevaz-l'Aile

London that night was held by golden ropes  
Fraying through the river's black.  
The "Queen of Spain" with all her costly lives  
Sat tight, as we set, formal in our hopes.  
The bottle on its ice-bed leaning back.  
We touched the cloth with bright, impatient knives.

Tides turn, the damaged love-boat drifts away;  
The marriage-coasters walk  
The plank, and one in torment almost screams  
But smiles instead; I unfixed my hands next day  
To light those flames that stroked our ice-chink talk.  
To meet you on the gentle breath of dreams.

Carol Rumens



## The Man From Selborne

In a toying manner  
The cock pursued the hen.  
His toy the hen.  
The vest rains ceased.  
The delicate weather now began.

I note the silent bird on the bough  
Which, flying, chatters, passing through the air  
That rubs a tune from throat and fasteners;

It is not the bird's the soogster, but the air.

The vast mazy buildings of that place,  
The many waters round it.

The slender, dusky scarecrow is the male worm;  
The female is a light to him, and his toy.

The spring heads never freeze, the wagtails  
Seek out the ever-flowing sources.

At midnight on Christmas Eve  
To assemble beneath the thorn-tree  
And listen for the bursting of the buds,  
Their stealthy opening.

The sexes change garments and woo,  
The goose-dancing, each is the other's toy,  
Vying with each other  
In politeness and gallantry, for ever.

Peter Redgrove



## Christmas Holidays

The Imperial War Museum was once quite small, housed in part of a building in Whitehall. I went there in the Christmas Holidays, when I was ten - standards, pistols, carbines; red squares, charging men in that partly romantic art that cannot be said to lie but still doesn't adequately express how woefully men die. Uniforms worn by Troopers and Generals, no doubt, models of gnuis perhaps - but one thing stood out.

"The skull of a man shot from a gun," it said. And there was this unremarkable bony head.

It didn't say who he was, or what he had done. I realized this was a punishment and not horroplay or fun. I didn't even know for certain if he was killed. I'd seen a man shot from a gun, and I'd been thrilled. He landed in a net the other side of the arena, stood up and took a bow - with a pleased and untroubled demeanour. Bertram Mills' Circus, a holiday treat, at Olympia. But here the evidence that he came through was very much skimpier - non-existent in fact. I imagined him pushed down the barrel, world as laid on his feet, would he be all right? I pondered these things quite a lot of the night.

I hoped he survived. But the skull? That was a puzzle. There's a radiating drawing of a man shot to a gun's muzzle in Gilbert's *Robt. Burns*; his eyes pop out of his head, the gunner holds the fire. It's clear he'll soon be dead, exploded over everything. The best execution: to choose (thought the British in India) because it upsets Hindus.

I found out all this, bit by bit, and the more I was enlightened the more I became aware of evil, and frightened. Gulls, sin, Retribution tracks in the brain, deep-grooved.

When I next went there, that exhibit had been removed.

Gavin Ewart

## A Stone Age Decadent

Uh.

Uh. These errant stripes of sun  
That feather in play across my legs design  
Transient ochres, ripples which the Sea  
Has lent the air. I seem to like it here:  
My tribal brothers work back up the stream  
For tucker; one small knot of womenfolk  
Go gathering shellfish where gold sand meets rock  
There in my middle distance. They compose quite well,  
Sun-burnished nymphs and mothers with dry tongues.  
Under these casuarines on my slope  
Of sandstone and soft needles I may hold  
A laid-back paco, keeping my cavernous head  
Well stocked with pictures.

Mm... hmuu. Let them retain  
Their rules and moieties. I disturb no-ooa.  
Neither affront those boring Bluetongue rules  
Nor trespass on Echidna's blunt decree  
Here where a sea-breeze lightly lifts my hair  
Flavoured with faint salt. Tribes are wise enough,  
Let them think me no-hoper if they want to.  
It troubles me no more than bushflies do  
While thoughts weft up this hill: from here old Sea  
Is crinkle-turquoise - rumpling, ruffled white;  
Gulls and swallows thread it.

Uh. Sheer solitude,  
Watching those totem branches bar sky's wink  
With their shockhead tresses. This is my secret  
Adaptation of totemic ground,  
Sequestered high, brown half-shade where I lounge  
Sending my spirit out to meet the Sea.  
Fly, fine colourless bird, on thorny wings,  
The words we use are only the words we're given,  
They do not like to hear me saying that,  
Preferring old songs, with their boom-bam-boom:

Here the big wave runs upon the shore.  
Here the spray blows up and up like smoke.  
Dolly the shellfish, dolly.  
Young girls gather foodstuffs by the white sands.  
At night the seagull has stopped crying.  
Dolly the shellfish, dolly.

Totem and law, laws and restrictive totetis,  
Banal, sublime, bestial, that's how  
My fellow tribespeople meke out the world.  
Practical sure enough - the fool comes in -  
But bone between the ears; at their sheer best,  
Witness down there, say, brown beautiful yet dumb.  
Motes dance in light-plant just above my shin  
And the glow-filled Sea flecks off her thousand colours  
In tides of mystery.

Listen. Gnuil nudi eurrewong  
Sound their antiphon. How fast the shadow  
Lengthen on sand, coarsen the hill-textures.  
There is pleasure in it all if you sit still.

I do not think they like me very much,  
Not even Moama with her small round breasts,  
Scrub of light curls, pool eyes, festmoving limbs  
And buttocks I could cup in these two hands  
And then... Oh-oh! It's very much too pleasant.  
That's to say painful, this line of thought:  
Body responds. There! She stoops at the rocks.  
I see only a single cloud today.  
Thin, flatish, grey-white, drifting above the horizon,  
All else says blue moets blue. And I relax  
On springy casuarine needles here, my den  
With a view. A spinebill's vivid uniform  
Flashes to flowers a little down my slope.  
I flex, reflect, withdrew. Ah, me. We all  
Must learn in a line of days to wither up  
And die - or die die first. Just like the scallop,  
Mussel, periwinkle, any living thing.  
Ah! Know something now. Am I a fly?

Here the spray blows up and up like smoke.  
Dolly the shellfish, dolly.

Peer closely at these jointed leaves or branchlets,  
Grass fingers of slender skeletal hands  
Knobbed with small tan knuckles. Just to stare  
With care at this or that makes world seem good.  
Be it spiky conelots or multiply-scored bark:  
I like it here. Those women on the sand.  
Make up a dance that fits a larger dance,  
The bay, the hills contribute to my joy  
As I do nothing. Ha. Yes. That's my game,  
My hunt for needful store of images.  
Lovely, yes; but what substance underlies all?  
What might all change mean? Are we like shellfish  
To be shocked, and eaten? Why does the great sun set?  
I wonder how we tagged these words to all.  
Life is more than animal grease and ochre.  
I well might fall asleep.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

## MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

### Fictions for future leaders

Prue Shaw

Joy HAMBEUCHEN POTTER  
Fifteen Frames for the Decameron:  
Communication and Social Systems  
in the Cornice  
220pp. Clarendon: Princeton  
University Press. £14.90.  
0 691 08003 9

The relationship between the one hundred tales told in the *Decameron* and the cornice or frame-story which surrounds them - the story of the story-telling itself - constitutes one of the enduring conundrums of literary history. Ten aristocratic young Florentines (seven women, three men) abandon their plague-ravaged city and withdraw to a secluded and idyllic country retreat, where they entertain one another by recounting a story apiece on each of ten days. The contrast between the world of the story-telling and the world of the tales is absolute. The group of story-tellers is homogeneous (they are all young, of noble birth, and scarcely characterized as individuals); their daily routine is repetitive, patterned, collaborative (a procedure is established in which each woman is king or queen for a day and rules the others); their behaviour is utterly decorous. The world of the stories, by contrast, seems to have the chaos and variety, the conflict and unpredictability, of life itself. The plots frequently turn on the unwitting of an adversary; the characters are drawn from all social classes; their conduct is rarely decorous, many of the tales being concerned with illicit sexual relationships or the shortcomings of those in religious orders. What is the reader to make of the juxtaposition of these two worlds?

Some critics limit the significance of the cornice to an extrinsic, architectural function - it imposes the pattern of ten groups of ten - dismissing it as an exercise in the narrow courts-of-love convention, and locating Boccaccio's true energy and originality in the tales; most, however, see the juxtaposition as

significant and bearing on the question of the meaning of the book, or at least of the meaning Boccaccio intended it to have for his readers. Certainly the pairs of terms which tend to recur in this context - ideal vs real, order vs chaos, aristocratic-feudal vs bourgeois-mercantile, medieval vs humanist - suggest not only the profundity of the abyss which separates the two worlds, but also the purposefulness of the juxtaposition, which must inevitably raise questions in the reader's mind about behaviour, codes of conduct, man's role as a social being.

Joy Hambeuchen Potter, in this interesting new study, sees the *Decameron* as a profoundly serious work, whose seriousness can be defined precisely in terms of the interplay between cornice and tales. The book, she argues, is educative in the broadest sense, its aim being social and political. Those to be educated are, firstly, the story-tellers themselves; and ultimately through them, Boccaccio's readers. The story-tellers are a privileged elite, future leaders of a society in a state of transition and crisis. Their retreat from the world is, in anthropological terms, a "liminal" experience, a ritual preparation for future responsibilities, in which the story-telling is the learning experience, the stories themselves the "learning content". A skeleton plot of the book might run: "a visitation by God that precipitates a ritual in which the elite of society are taught the enduring values of their world".

The anthropological model enables Professor Potter to characterize the book's seriousness, while accounting for all its component parts: if Boccaccio's claim that the tales are meant as harmless entertainment to while away the idle hours of lovesick ladies were true, there would be no need for the cornice, nor for the long and graphic description of the Black Death in Florence in 1348 and the breakdown of social order in the city which followed the plague. The ambiguity created by the author's mock-modest statement of intent is a deliberate strategy to protect the subversiveness of his message.

Both the essential seriousness and the deliberate ambiguity of the *Decameron* are further analysed by Potter using concepts and terminology borrowed from semiotics and frame-theory. The five frames of her title refer to the layered construction of the text, which can be represented geometrically as a series of concentric circles: at the centre, the world of the stories; surrounding it, that of the cornice; then that of the plague; then that of the ladies for whom Boccaccio claims to be writing; finally, the outermost shell, the world of Boccaccio's book and its readers. By a constant play of "frame-shifts" and "frame-breaks", that is by deliberately slipping from one frame to another, Boccaccio disorients the reader, sustaining ambiguity about the frivolity or seriousness of his intentions. At the same time, the framing itself points to the value, the importance, of what is framed: the stories occupy the privileged position at the centre and carry the full weight of what Boccaccio wants to communicate.

Seriousness masquerading as frivolity is not a difficult concept to grasp, and perhaps does not require the painstakingly thorough demonstration that Potter provides. If the intention is serious, as she claims, what is it that the story-tellers learn? Her answer is so generic as to be almost empty of content: "Boccaccio set out to teach his ten protagonists a good set of values that would enable them to preserve the old virtues and also to function effectively as leaders in their world." But what values? The difficulty is not so much that different stories reflect conflicting values - conflict can be instructive - but that it is notoriously difficult to pinpoint the "values" even single stories embody or celebrate. Does Boccaccio admire or condemn the nimble-witted but scandalous behaviour of his engagingly self-serving friars? At what point does tolerance become complicity? What "value" is being exhibited in the story of Alibech, the young girl who goes off into the desert alone in order to serve God, meets a monk who teaches her to "put the devil in hell", and develops

such a taste for this now religious exercise that she exhausts her mentor who views her eventual return to civilization with considerable relief? (Strangely, Potter says nothing of this thesis, which is correct if surely becomes a key text, being the only tale which parallels and parodies the cornice itself: the only story in the collection about a retreat, a "learning" experience, and a return to the world, although the "learning content" has become not discourse - stories - but sex.)

In fact, although Potter spends a whole chapter analysing Boccaccio's "desacralization" of the church as a social institution - and here the anthropological terminology adds little or nothing to what common sense suggests - she offers no comment about the many stories explicitly concerned with the fulfilment of sexual passion (yet here surely is where the true subversiveness of the book lies). If these are the raw material of instruction, just what is being learned? Again the blandness of the formulation is disconcertingly inadequate: "The ten future leaders of a regenerated society must learn to understand the passions that form part of everyday living and to give both reality and the ideal its due. As the incredibly rich gamut of the stories shows, they must also learn to control their desires when it is necessary for the greater good of society."

One unguarded remark of a more specific kind - to the effect that equality of the sexes "is not part of the values they are to learn" - enables us to pinpoint another difficulty. If the learning experience is the centre of the book's meaning, then the reactions of the listeners to the various stories become crucial: but these are never much more than perfunctory, and often seem to contrast with the spirit in which the story itself has been told. One of the ladies expresses at some length the traditional misogynist view of woman's natural inferiority to men; yet both cornice and stories, in very

different ways but with equal insistence, seem to assert the opposite. The most striking of all contrasts between the story-tellers and their characters is that the story-tellers, although each of them loves or is loved, are without exception chaste, while in the tales the characters who have amorous urges almost invariably find sexual fulfilment; yet the most striking parallel between cornice and tales is precisely that in both of them men and women are shown to be equals: absolute social and intellectual equals in the highly stylized and artificial world of the story-telling, absolute equals in human dignity and in their sexual natures in the tales. Set against this powerful and repeatedly reinforced message, the conventional declaration of women's inferiority seems merely a token gesture. If the educational model requires that we "privilege" what the story-tellers say, as Potter does in this instance, then it imposes a naively one-dimensional reading on the rich ambiguity of the text; but in fact there seems to be an unresolved logical contradiction here, for Potter herself insists that the stories themselves carry the message.

The appeal of Potter's model is that it does justice to our sense that the *Decameron* is more than just a glorious romp, and that its claim to seriousness is in some sense, however difficult to define, ethical as well as artistic. That the book forces its readers to examine their values can be confirmed by anyone who has ever had the experience of discussing it with undergraduates: in all the Italian literary canon it is perhaps the text which most effectively compels this kind of scrutiny. But to impose the educational model too rigidly raises more problems than it solves. Professor Potter surely overstates her case when she concludes that a book condemned for many generations as obscene is in reality offering its readers a "training for leadership and responsible civic behaviour on the upper levels of society."

## The Middle ground

Heather O'Donoghue

A. BURROW  
Medieval Writers and Their Work:  
Middle English Literature and its  
Background 1100-1500  
Oxford University Press.  
255p (paperback, £3.95).  
0 19 219357

P. W. Bateson was not a supporter of medieval studies, and yet it is neither appropriate nor ironic that John Burrow has dedicated *Medieval Writers and Their Work* to his memory. Burrow's book is concerned mainly with literary matters. To the extent that "most readers of Middle English are more interested in English literature than in the Middle Ages", he does not try, as other medieval critics have, to beguile his readers with descriptions of the intricate splendour of Gothic cathedrals or the medieval world-view, hoping thereby to lure them into an appreciation of medieval literature. This book does not provide the kind of background information its subtitle may lead readers to expect.

Instead, taking as his starting-point the operations, and perhaps the operations, the prejudices, of "the modern literary critic", Burrow presents his introductory work with a discussion of those criteria of medieval literature, and moves on to consider notions of authorship and readership, genre, modes of meaning and finally the reception, past, present and possible future, of Middle English literature in English literary tradition.

The question of which Middle English works deserve a place in the canon of English literature lies at the heart of this book. Recognizing the possibility of leaving almost no prose work at all in Middle English if literary standards of *literature* are strictly applied, Burrow cautions the reader against dismissing works on

grounds of non-literariness - although this is, of course, a trap modernist critics will be very well aware of. And yet, when he comes to consider medieval verse, Burrow has to admit that "the question may be simply one of quality". Much of *Medieval Writers and Their Work* bears out this admission: Burrow is clearly happiest and on firmest ground when discussing the literariness of the "big three" - Chaucer, Langland and the *Cleaveland Poet*. As all those familiar with *A Reading of Sir Gawayn and the Green Knight* and *Richard Poet* will know, Burrow can produce fine close readings of texts, and there are several excellent passages of such criticism even in this general, introductory book. He gives the reader a clear and enlightening analysis of the Good Samaritan scene in *Passus XVII of Piers Plowman*, for instance. He just as effectively demolishes the opening of the verse romance *Havelok* (all "verbal rubble" and "stereotyped" and "inappropriate epithets") - but without giving any good literary reason for reading *Havelok*, beyond noting that the work is "not all... like this".

To introduce Middle English literature with the modernist in mind is almost inevitably to take up an embattled position. Burrow, however, is, and quite justifiably so, not a defensively partisan about medieval literature. Indeed, the whole point of this book is to explain the strangeness of Middle English literature without indulging in special pleading for it. As a result, though, *Medieval Writers and Their Work* runs the risk of damning with faint praise, of raising doubts without quite dispelling them. There is also a slight air of wistfulness about the closing paragraphs, as Burrow ponders the future of Middle English literature. He remarks that "Middle English literature is not the same as the twentieth century: as it was in the nineteenth; and in the twenty-first it will no doubt be different again". A characteristically rational and relativistic view, but his next point -

that "perhaps future readers will be able to look more dispassionately at Middle English literature" - eloquently implies the defensive position which he has tried not to adopt.

I suspect that the reader Burrow has in mind for this book is the student who has already embarked on Middle English - probably because there is some compulsory medieval literature on the syllabus - and feels baffled and resentful. Such a student will find Burrow's approach "congenial, stimulating and helpful". Throughout the book there are sound discussions of ill-posed questions undergraduate readers of Middle English invariably ask, and some useful distinctions are drawn: between allegory and exemplification, and between the affirmation and the imitation of truth in didactic literature. The bibliography is a model of what one would wish, but perhaps not expect, the good student to read. Sometimes Professor Burrow's categories are not very helpful; his chapter on genre, for example, fails to mention *Piers Plowman*, even as a notoriously difficult case, and I am not convinced of the usefulness of his division of Middle English narrative into "Histories", "Lives" and "Tales" as if these were as distinct as apples and oranges. But this is an excellent book for drawing attention to and clarifying the special difficulties of Middle English literature, even though it may not entice or convert the reader whose interest and attention are not already compelled, either by natural inclination or by obligation.

The recently published Number 11 of the New Series of *Medieval and Humanistic Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*, edited by Paul Maurice Clogan (304pp., Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982, £32.50, 0 8476 7105 4) contains fifteen original articles and review articles, principally on theology and literature. They include "Medieval Tragedy and the Genre of *Troilus and Criseyde*" by Andrea Clough.

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## Transparently helpful

Michael Irwin

Tadeusz Rózewicz

Conversation with the Prince: and other poems  
Translated and introduced by Adam Czerniawski

206pp. Anvil Press. £4.95.  
0 85446 079 6

Rózewicz has been a major figure in Polish literature since the end of the Second World War. The 119 poems translated by Adam Czerniawski span, with rough symmetry, the period between 1946 and 1981. Yet, even in English, the earlier and the later works speak with the same voice. This is largely an effect of technique. Rózewicz's free verse clings to the left-hand margin of the page. He dispenses with rhyme, metre, punctuation. Metaphors are few and usually thin. Czerniawski confirms what many of the poems themselves suggest, that this antipoeic mode was a calculated attempt to find a language sufficiently unadorned to permit a faithful response to the horrors Rózewicz witnessed as a resistance fighter in the war. When the verse is doing no more than conveying information the plainness can come close to empty mannerism. But when, as is frequently the case, there is a powerful idea or image to be expressed, the style comes into its own, as in "To the Heart":

I watched  
an expert cook  
he would thrust his hand  
into the windpipe  
pushing it through  
into the sheep's  
tissue  
and there in the quick  
would grasp the heart  
his fingers closing  
round the heart  
would rip out the heart  
with one pull  
yes  
he certainly was an expert

The elimination of poetic devices throws all the emphasis on the bare statement, and on the sub-divisions of that statement. Here each line of the verse has sufficient point, energy and definition to justify the responsibility that its brevity obliges it to carry. The translator's task would seem to be a narrow but difficult one. He scarcely needs to find equivalents for effects of sound or metaphor in the original: he must reduce the poem to bare assertion. Czerniawski is adept in achieving the requisite terseness. Milosz's translations of Rózewicz read well and look irreducible, but repeatedly Czerniawski is able to pare away a word here and a word there—most obviously through the elimination of articles—to reach a pebble-like finality. It has apparently been claimed by certain Polish reviewers that Rózewicz's poems sometimes come off better in English than in the original. It does indeed seem plausible that an unadorned language, grammatically liberal, and we are stuck with monosyllabic primary words would provide a sympathetic medium for a poet of Rózewicz's temperament. Czerniawski makes the most of such potentialities. Milosz renders "Leave Us Alone," one of the many poems in which Rózewicz writes of the dehumanizing effect of his wartime experiences, into so many words of English. Through daring ellipses Czerniawski makes do with only four lines: the result is a small but significant gain in sharpness of effect.

Quoted in the translator's interesting and helpful introduction is a statement by Rózewicz himself about his poetic method:

"I was aiming at a poetry of absolute transparency, so that the dramatic material might be seen through the poem; just as in clear water you can see what is moving on the bottom. And so the form had to vanish, had to become transparent; it had to become identified with the subject of the given poem."

Transparency remains an objective even when the "dramatic material" displayed is simple to the point of being commonplace:

I was sitting in a easy chair  
I supposed reading  
suddenly I heard  
my heart beating  
it was so unexpected

as though a stranger had entered into me  
and hammered with a clenched fist  
some unknown creature  
locked inside me  
there was something indecent  
in its battering with no relation  
to me  
to my abstract thought

The admirer (or, I'd have thought, the disparager) of such a work isn't left with much to say. There are no patterns of sound or imagery to analyse. Arguably this is not so much a poem as the raw material for a poem. Rózewicz would presumably claim that to identify and to isolate this raw material is a sufficient act of poetic creation; to write it up would be to falsify. The reader who can respond to the experience responds to the poem. It is a measure of Rózewicz's achievement that so many of the poems in *Conversation with the Prince* are nakedly accessible. When he writes less than well his work stands self-condemned: the transparency reveals banality. The poems that are obscure are interestingly so, in that the difficulty is unlikely to be a matter of vocabulary or technique. In the great majority of cases there is a curiously direct communication. A successful Rózewicz poem, one that is true to its subject-matter, has the shine and ring of a new coin. The denotation of the coin is another matter: there are plenty of pence in the collection alongside the crowns and sovereigns. But it is intrinsic to Rózewicz's method that he is willing to treat a comparatively humble idea on its own terms.

If the honesty can appear programmatic it is never less than impressive. It helps to make this selection something more than the sum total of its considerable parts. Czerniawski quotes Rózewicz on the usefulness of literature:

I search books and poems for practical help. I hope they will help me overcome despair and doubt.... Because I myself have always searched, begged for help, I began to think that I too may be able to help, though of course I also have moments when I feel it's not worth anything.

Much of Rózewicz's own usefulness has to do with the tireless curiosity and

honesty with which he has recorded his responses to forty years of experience. His more personal poems can have the impact of an intimate letter from a friend:

But whoever sees my mother  
in a purple smock in a white hospital  
reminding  
sufficing  
with a wooden smile  
and white gums  
who for fifty years had faith  
but now weeps and says  
'I don't know... I don't know'  
her face is like a large smudged tear  
she clasps her hands like a frightened little girl  
her lips are blue  
but whoever sees my mother  
a hounded little animal  
with a bulging eye  
oh  
it would like to bear her upon my heart  
and nourish her with sweetness

The craftsmanship here—the vivid precision of detail, the handling of metaphor, the calculated breakdowns in syntax—subverts an anguished frankness. Rózewicz's "transparency," painstakingly but unobtrusively achieved, discloses his feelings and reactions in such sharp focus that we can learn from them: as fellow human beings we compare notes.

As the foregoing may have implied, there are poems in this selection that seem almost pedantically minimal. But the overall impression is not one of austerity. Some of Rózewicz's themes demand to be explored through metaphor. A recent example is "Tree-Felling," which is dedicated to the memory of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz.

Tree-cutting is an execution  
void of ceremony  
splitting sawdust  
the mechanical saw  
enters the bark the pulp and the core  
like lightning  
struck at its side  
it collapsed  
and fell into the undergrowth  
with its dead weight  
it squashed grass and herbs  
slender light blades  
and trembling gossamer

together with the tree  
they destroyed its shade

## Singularly self-involved

Julian Symons

Czesław Miłosz

Visions from San Francisco Bay  
Translated by Richard Lourie  
225pp. Manchester: Corgi. £6.95  
0 85435 453 8

What can be seen, then, looking out from San Francisco Bay? Visions of the world, past, present and possibly to be, images of a Europe not always recognizable to those who live in it, above all a shimmering view of an America once Whitmanesque in its simplicity, now bubbling with youthful rebellion like a pot left too long on the stove. It is an America that could be seen as it is in this book only by a European hardened and sophisticated through the experience of Communism. It is because Czesław Miłosz spent much of the war in Nazi-occupied Warsaw and then, as a functionary of the Polish Communist Government that his visions take their particular shapes, and because after breaking with the régime he landed in California and in Berkeley that he feels "certain that something still unnamed and absolutely new is now emerging" in the United States. Had a European ten years of exile in France, had he made a long fall at an East Coast college, had he been "made it" as an American West, the visions would be less apocalyptic.

All this Miłosz perfectly understands. As the autobiographical *Native Realm* and his poems show, he is quick-witted, at home in a European way with abstract ideas, adept at pushing those ideas to extreme conclusions. He is also self-aware, in the point of self-absorption, and it is no surprise that the opening words of his book are "I am here," or that this first of many brief sections is called "My

Intention." The intention is to understand himself, to understand the United States, to communicate something singular to Czesław Miłosz. Yet is that something important? Of course the question occurs to Miłosz, who does not miss a single ironical nuance. "I am brave and undaunted in the certainty of having something important to say to the world"—yet on the next page he imagines somebody in a bookshop looking at the works of many people with similar thoughts, and reflecting: "Silence is better." The book begins with a view of the immensities in American nature, which stir at times the feeling of many Europeans that America is beautiful but that there is altogether too much of it, coexisting with reflections on its religion, censorship, and those modern philosophies that announce the necessary extinction, rather than the decline of the West, and end up like a serpent swallowing its tail with the impact of America on Czesław Miłosz. The translation by Richard Lourie reads smoothly throughout.

Miłosz's self-involved irony, which touches every theme he approaches, is damaging to arguments which are so concerned to see both sides that they end by expressing no clear opinion. A subject is raised, its opposite stated, and then a view that might perhaps be the writer's, is seen through the mist of self-deprecation sometimes masquerading as self-applause. In "On Censorship," for example, Miłosz remarks on the Surrealist praise of the "Violette Nozère's poisoning of her bourgeois parents, and goes on to consider de Sade as the figure who pushes this idea as far as it will go, in the point of self-absorption, and it is no surprise that the opening words of his book are "I am here," or that this first of many brief sections is called "My

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The attitude most often expressed in these conversational pieces with himself is that Miłosz is on the side of reason and logic, but is astonished that they have not yet succumbed to Sadeian savagery and the desire for destruction. It is amazing, he says on the last page, that the human race has not exterminated itself long ago, and that "something like America exists." He is fascinated by the contradictions of a society with enormous economic power, derived in part from literally non-human technical achievement, which also contains a large group that continually and passionately inflicts the society by its torrid logic. Surely, by the time of the World War, those dissidents must be permanently crushed by the American

individualism go further? Miłosz goes on to point out that such ideas are behind the film *Bonnie and Clyde*, which is about "poor people divested of their human horizons who shoot other people because that is the only way they can regain their dignity." He remarks on the film's extreme bloodiness, and says that for students of violence and indirectly against the war in Vietnam. On the other hand "many others" saw it and were stimulated in other ways, and less desire and Clyde could be seen as a film against violence, when the makers took such evident pleasure in violent scenes, but the idea is interesting. What are Miłosz's conclusions? We are never told. If the ideas of the Surrealists and de Sade are unacceptable, then the film's approach must be so too, especially because in it violence is made sympathetic in the persons of the protagonists. But Miłosz does not wish to be committed to a definite opinion. He drifts away instead into commonplaces about the real life violence we look at on the television screen.

MIŁOZ'S SELF-INVOLVED IRONY, WHICH TOUCHES EVERY THEME HE APPROACHES, IS DAMAGING TO ARGUMENTS WHICH ARE SO CONCERNED TO SEE BOTH SIDES THAT THEY END BY EXPRESSING NO CLEAR OPINION.

FRANCE

## In touch with the Other

Anthony Levi

Michel de Certeau

La Fable Mystique  
XVI-XVIIe Siècle  
416pp. Paris: Gallimard.  
2 07 02074 1

I share with the author of *La Fable mystique* a deep interest in the history of western spirituality, and particularly that of seventeenth-century France. But much I admire some of Michel de Certeau's earlier work, notably the recent edition of the *Surin* letters (1968). I feel that the present book owes too much to Michel Foucault in its approach to the publisher's explanation of the back cover: "Comment découvrir un lieu de l'interlocution? Comment donner un corps à la parole? Comment naître dans un espace créé par le dire de l'Autre? Cela revient à décrire une poétique du corps humain." In fact de Certeau, together with a whole school of modern French intellectuals, whose prose style like his thought is influenced by Jacques Lacan to the point of disaster, has come to write in a French as obscure and allusive as he can make it. There is no clear central affirmation or argument in *La Fable mystique*. Just antipositivist analogies, structural analysis, in this case of mostly verbal accounts of hypernormal spiritual experiences, interwoven with hints derived from sometimes capriciously chosen material and valuable historical information, leading to the strong suggestion that we need to re-examine the meaning and structure of our spiritual experience. There are, however, precious beams of insight which struggle to pierce the haze.

How did the French term *mystique* combine the roles of noun and adjective? De Certeau rightly follows

Henri de Lubac in relating the term "corpus mysticum" to the Eucharist before it came to mean the Church. But is "mystical," as in "mystical theology," a synonym for "contemplative"? How do you explain the use made of the relationship or identification for so many centuries between any two or more of "folly," "wisdom" and "sanctity"? Structural and historical analyses show the recurrence of certain sorts of images in the description of intense spiritual experience, whether or not in a committed religious context. De Certeau finds constant references to the Other (God?), to an intermediary with the Other (an angel, a beggar?), to a place of remoteness (a garden, a desert?), a strong increase in recorded accounts of "mystical" experience in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and a diminution in them thereafter, whether or not caused by increased understanding of neurotic and psychotic illness (hysteria, paranoia), or by the power of the unconscious and the images, patterns and exhilarations it can cause.

Is there, in short, an experience behind the "fable," and if so how does it relate to the literary expressions of spiritual experience in the content of western spirituality and to any known theology? Theology itself is carefully avoided in the book. De Certeau brings out the constants neutrally without prejudging their implications. Nowhere, for instance, does he affirm the existence of the "Other," except in so far as the "Other" is a generalized feature of mystical discourse. The book starts by analysing a fourth and a sixth-century text, passes through the analysis of a painting by Bosch and the history of the usage of the word "mystique" to go on to deal in some detail with John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila. It is at its best in dealing with the pockets of Jesuit spiritual resistance (especially Surin) to institutional rigidity, and ends with

the analysis of a poem by Catherine Pozzi written in 1929. Essentially therefore, de Certeau is opening up the question of the meaning of paranormal spiritual experience, generally but not exclusively achieved inside a historical Christian commitment and context. It is impossible to deny the existence of such experience. The difficulty is to explain not only the structure of the imagery in which clearly religious claims are expressed, but also its relationship to other similarly structured expressions of paranormal spiritual experience outside a religious context.

Jean-Joseph Surin (1600-65) makes an ideal central figure. He joined the Jesuits in 1616, later became a disciple of perhaps the greatest of all Jesuit spiritual directors, Louis Lullamant, and was sent to Loudun in 1634 to replace, as director of the "possessed" nuns, the ill-named Père Tranquille who specialized in provoking the more spectacular manifestations of possession from them all, but in particular from their superior, Jeanne des Anges. Not much is said about Loudun in this book, but the phenomenon appears to have been hysterical since Surin, by cutting off the public performances and by cultivating with endless patience peace of soul, healed the nuns of whatever spiritual, psychological or physical sickness ail them.

Surin's passive mysticism, of which there had always been pockets in the Jesuits, made him suspect in Rome. About two hundred letters out of six hundred extant in all are to Jeanne des Anges. A hundred and fifty of the six hundred were written before Surin himself broke down, attempting suicide in 1645, with about four hundred and fifty dating from after his recovery in 1657. One would like to know why, even today, "exorcism" is so productive of mental derangement in its practitioners.

## An orgy of intermediacy

Stephen Romer

Bertrand Poirot-Delpech

Feuilletons 1972-1982  
420pp. Paris: Gallimard. 72 fr.  
2 07 02723 0

Le Châlier du Dancin  
440pp. Paris: Gallimard. 42 fr.  
2 07 02909 8

At the best of times, it is imprudent for a writer to use an opigraph from Plautus for a critic—knowing how Plautus detested critics—to do so is decidedly rash. Yet this is what

Bertrand Poirot-Delpech has risked at the beginning of his *Feuilletons* 1972-1982. "Le seul moyen de supporter l'existence, c'est de s'écrouler dans la littérature comme dans une orgie perpétuelle." What is remarkable in this case, and what is so rare, is that Poirot-Delpech lives up to his opigraph. For these weekly *feuilletons* from *Le Monde des livres*, selected from the past decade, communicated a joy in the act of reading which would not, I think, have left the reader unmoved. They represent a substantial contribution to the best in literary journalism: economy of means, consistency of vision, undragged curiosity and a burning light of wit. The best of those pieces, where Poirot-Delpech is most in sympathy with his writer, read like minor essays and contain a polemical edge which any universalist might do well to take into account. In contrast to the current vices of French reviewing—intimidating jargon or a repressed impressionism—Poirot-Delpech has signified the role of the critic.

He uses to define that role more clearly in his introduction, which is a mixture of pride and modesty. "I am an almost childlike pride in the 'other' situations: over ten years he has read 1,000 books (of which this selection contains 10 per cent), and in the number of books he has read four times over a day with, on his own dogs, a growing appetite. His modesty is that of the disclaimer, that

he is only a "fairly subjective" intermediary between producer and consumer. At the same time he is aware of his considerable influence in the book world and endeavours to give a more definite outline of himself, sharpened by the indispensable self-disciplines of impartiality, detachment, informativeness and a refusal to indulge in the facile game of "annihilation" which serves nobody. Sternest discipline of all: to be perpetually on guard against what he sees as the "mal français" itself, that tendency in the language to reduce everything to an intellectual schema at the expense of an immediate, felt response.

During the past ten years Poirot-Delpech has frequently been moved to eloquence. And when we count the dead of that period his term "hecatomb" is justified: Mitterrand, Malraux, Caillois, Jouhandeau, Sartre and Barthes to name but a few. The second part of the book is devoted to these, the "Disparus de la décadence," and it contains the best pieces. Rereading the homage and farewell to Barthes, for instance, brought back the shock, outrage and sorrow so many felt at a seemingly arbitrary death. The initial hurt, expressed *à vif*, is followed by a full assessment in which Barthes is defended against his detractors and warmly commended for his refusal to be didactic and for his fragility, sensuality and "intelligent docility" of the labor works. It is also here that Poirot-Delpech makes the thoroughly original comparison with Glide: the same well-to-do, to take into account, in contrast to the current vices of French reviewing—intimidating jargon or a repressed impressionism—Poirot-Delpech has signified the role of the critic.

With Sartre, who pointed Man without God, free, responsible and without excuse, we find the blueprint for those "engagements excessifs" the hardening of hearts—that can be read into so many of these careers. The embracing of and recoiling from ideologies, the dolorous polarization of the war, the elaborate acts of penitence (or suicide) after the event—these are the violent trajectories, passed in review, encapsulated in the wildly divergent destinies of

De Certeau's historical understanding is almost flawless. There is a slip in the dating of the *Augustinus* (1640) and the translation of "vera inaccessatutude" in the note on p.28 is sufficiently strained to be a warning light. There are more serious defects, too, notably in the selectivity of his examples and allusions. There is neither an index nor a bibliography. The spiritual direction of Olier and Rancé as recorded in their letters may not conform so easily to the structures chosen for analysis by de Certeau. We can only conjecture about mystical experience at Port-Royal, although I would myself for instance contest the commonly held view that the experience recorded in Pascal's *Mémorial* was properly mystical, but the direction of Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal by François de Sales whose Augustinianism has never fitted into de Certeau's pigeon-holes, while augmenting the historical dimension of the text, may well challenge its structural suggestions, as could also the related spiritualities of Condren, Bérulle, Ghibieux and Olier. Strangely, de Certeau regards François de Sales's *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu* (1616) with its splendidly baroque images from natural history, as written in "un ton moins fleuri" than the relatively down-to-earth *Introduction à la vie dévote* (1609). What gets in the way, however, is a certain pretentiousness in the writing, with banal German words explained by equally banal French ones, "ca" for "Es," "lieu" for "Ort," "parole" for "Wort" or "chose" for "Ding." Why introduce the discussion of a fourth-century text with a quotation from Marguerite Duras, or

preface the semantic history of the word "mystique" with a long dissertation about neologisms? Much more needs to be said, too, about what is and is not "mystical." Here the Jesuits have always taken a conservative line, disliking and distrusting the idea of an intrusion of the paranormal in spite of the experience of their founder, and at any rate officially reluctant to attribute it to divine intervention in which, for them, properly mystical states consist. I have often noticed that claims of mystical experience in France tend to be associated, with notable exceptions, with generally right-wing views and aristocratic social status, just as properly mystical experiences were less rare than usual in the conditions of extreme mystical deprivation in some of the German concentration camps. De Certeau can adduce little evidence to explain why mystical experiences were accorded to an aristocracy without any proper social function. Why to so few of them, and for only two brief centuries? The late Lucien Goldmann came to grief in just such an attempt at a sociological analysis of religious alignments.

What is important, however, and the underlying question posed in this book, is why mystical experience can be neither defined, expressed, nor explained in language, and to what "absence" or "Other" it may relate. The answer can only lie in some sort of theology, but it is a major and welcome shock to be confronted, however obliquely, with some of the difficult questions to which theology has never provided satisfactory answers.

## With friends at court

Robin Buss

Jean Deloy

Avant Mémoires 3: La Fauconnerie  
375pp. Paris: Gallimard. 95 fr.  
2 07 02151 2

The first two volumes of Jean Deloy's history of his maternal ancestors ended in 1736, with the family established in the ranks of the Parisian bourgeoisie to which it had acceded by hard work, thrift and thoughtful alliances (TLS, October 10, 1980). The story to that point centred on Monsieur Dancin, the rather than Dom Juan, and though it emphasized the importance of women as economically active members of the family, did not dispute the position of the man as chief wage-earner and definer of the family's social status. But this is the history of the maternal line, and, as the present volume shows, women were much less immune to sudden changes of fortune and status.

From 1736 to 1744, the branch of the family set up by the marriage of Marguerite de Gournay with the wig-maker André Fauconner, was cut loose by a series of misfortunes, starting with the death of André, the gradual failure of the business and the loss of the only son overboard from his ship off Pondicherry; and ending with the death of Marguerite, which left two surviving children, Madeleine-Joséphine and Marie-Anne, still in their teens and alone in the world. Enter Dom Juan:

He comes first in the shape of a disolute and ageing Polish diplomat, Towianski, whose social connections and knowledge of court etiquette prove invaluable. The two sisters eventually take up with the Duc de Gramont and the Duc de Launay, bear illegitimate children and are swept into a world which their pious grandmother, Anne-Magdeleine Gahny, would no doubt have regarded as the antechamber to hell.

Once more, Deloy's patient research has allowed him to uncover an exemplary story of the times: the Boucher painting reproduced on the dust-jacket is not mere decoration. But this is not a general history of eighteenth-century France, or a historical fiction; it is a detailed and more copious documentary evidence of the social and political forces at work behind the pretty caprices of Boucher and Fragonard, or to animate the characters who inhabit them. But partly by sheer good fortune and

mainly by its skilful marshalling of the evidence, to show how a telling detail in the story of one family can evoke an entire society. A historian, discussing the twin milieux of "court" and "town" under Louis XV, would be unlikely to bother with Madeleine Fauconner, mistress of a nobleman who was censured for neglecting his court duties; while no historical novelist could have invented the combination of circumstances that makes her, once rejected by the Duc de Gramont, the editor of a now-sheet published to inform the "town" of the niceties of court etiquette relating to mourning, the *Ordre chronologique des deuil de cour*, which allowed dedicated followers of court fashion to know when mourning should be worn, and of what type and for how long.

In the previous two volumes, Deloy relied mainly on the records of the *Minutier Central* to trace, through such documents as marriage contracts, the network of the family's social relations, as well as the facts and dates of births, marriages and deaths. The range of sources here is richer, partly because the two sisters have moved into a class whose activities were better recorded, partly because of the growth in the means of information and in publishing. We still have to guess at their intimate feelings and their characters, though a poignant note on a playbill tells us that the younger was known as "La Joyeuse". "A cause de son humeur qui est comme ça". They certainly had pluck and, having apparently deliberately cut themselves off from what remained of their family, seem to have had no reservations about their new life-style. Their liaisons may have been dangerous, but their lovers were not Valmonts and they seem to have provided moderately well for their mistresses and for the children, whom they acknowledged.

The story, which has started like *Lolita*, ends more like *Diderot*, with the thoroughly suitable match of Cécile, *la fille naturelle*, with Jean Devaux. But all is not well: the Revolution is approaching and Devaux is an incompetent manager of his business affairs. For the outcome, we shall have to wait for the fourth and final volume, which will bring this family history within range of living memory and tell us how, from the even more copious documentary evidence of the nineteenth century, Deloy contrives to balance wit and insight in his story of one family's progress across the stage of social history.



# The surgeon's eye-view

Redmond O'Hanlon

MICHAEL LEVINE (Editor)

The Cree Journals: The Voyages of Edward H. Cree, Surgeon R.N., as Related in His Private Journals, 1837-1856

276pp. Exeter: Webb and Bower. £9.95. 0 906671 36 1

This book is the rich result of the kind of discovery which historians dream about: the finding, in a Devon farmhouse attic, of twenty-one bound volumes of diaries written by one of those Victorian Englishmen who can look death in the face with a quiet glance. The diaries are a reliable eye-witness account of life at sea in the early to mid nineteenth century, of the First Opium War, of the hunting and navalengagement of the missed pirate fleets of the South China Sea, of the Tongkin River, of the slaughter of the Crimea; and their author is also a prolific water-colourist of great talent, a vivid and humorous observer and (certainly more than we have a right to expect at the price) his work is here lavishly reproduced, both throughout the text and in three huge panoramic pull-outs of the major paintings.

From the top of the conquered Porcelaine Tower, the walled and moated city of Nanjing in 1842 unfolds across one's desk; H.M.S. Vex, Pluto and Nemesis anchor in Brunei before the Sultan's Palace; and Valorous, Odin and Hecla exchange fire with the great grim fort at Bomersund, one of the four main defensive points guarding the Gulf of Finland which commanded the sea approaches to St Petersburg, during the action in which Charles Davis Lucas, the Mate of HMS Hecla, lifted a live shell from the deck of his ship and heaved it overboard, which earned him the first Victoria Cross.

Skilfully edited from an original million and a quarter words (and a choice of 1700 paintings and sketches), the journals themselves are equally immediate. Edward Cree (1814-1901), the son of a Unitarian minister, read medicine at Dublin and Edinburgh and received his first appointment from the Admiralty as Assistant Surgeon on HMS Royal Adelaide, flagship of Deboynton, whence he was ordered to do duty at the Naval Hospital, Stonehouse, under the Physician Sir David Dickson. The work was not arduous (but then Cree never seems to find anything arduous) and he particularly enjoyed the evening round, "which lasted about half an hour. Old Sir David had then evidently dined, and was sometimes a little thick in his speech and very combed, and I have seen him feel for the pulse of the leg of an empty bed which had been put up against the wall, much to the suppressed mirth of the nurse and Assistant Surgeon.

In a high wind on Saturday, June 24, 1837, Queen Victoria was proclaimed at the hospital gates and Cree, just as fresh to the task ahead, ordered his new blue and gold uniform, records his own ceremonial problems in characteristic detail: "big cocked hat, was like a fore-and-aft sail" which almost carried his head away, and his sword "would endeavour to get between my legs".

Leaving Balmouth ("what strikes one most... is the everlasting clatter of women's patters about the streets") and the shores of old England, which soon grew dim and I sensed "he is ordered to Malta, noting everything from a Turkish valley full of turbaned Moors" near the Zambretta Rocks to the "fine sight of the-of battle ships coming through the narrow entrance of Valletta Harbour" and full sail and firing a salute; three shrouding sail all at once and swinging round to their anchors. His entries glow with unforgotten fleetings: "desires children's faces under the hood or under the shawl"; "with good figures under steady dress"; "lovely held on deck ashore"; and with the attained satisfaction of almost equally good dinners to the officers' messes of grand ships ("many young lordlings and gentlemen").

The suspicion grows that at least a part of his easy toughness derives from the indirectly self-protective act of the writing and painting itself. A pleasurable ordering of event and identity which appears to cocoon him from many of the ordinary physical and psychological dangers of life at sea, and which will serve him well in the extraordinary testing to come. Cholera is a routine matter, but more telling, perhaps, are the failings before likewise invisible but more subtle onslaughts: a supernumerary lieutenant in the cabin next to Cree's is heard growling to himself, "He said he had a headache and seemed impatient at being questioned. His pulse was hardly perceptible, eyes suffused and bloodshot, extremities cold." The lieutenant commits suicide by taking arsenic ("He bequeathed his watch to some lady"), and a similar death gives Cree his first full post at sea, the Assistant Surgeon of H.M. Steamer Firefly "having poisoned himself in his cabin. This makes the third naval officer who has committed suicide on this station within the last week."

On HMS Rattle-snake (the same ship which set out six years later to survey the Torres Straits and the Australian Seas with another young naval surgeon and amateur diarist and painter on board, T. H. Huxley), in the China Sea, on a sultry morning in June, 1840, Cree, reading in his cabin, hears "the dismal cry of a man overboard". A young marine, jumping from the poop into the mizen-chains to clear the headline, has missed his footing, and is "striking out for his life towards the buoy which is within five yards of him. He was tugging away towards it but did not get nearer, although he was a good swimmer. The cutter with Harper and a crew had almost reached him when he disappeared to sea no more. They tried to reach him with the boat-hook; as the water was clear, they saw an enormous shark had got hold of his white jumper in the middle, gradually going down deeper and deeper till they disappeared. The men in the cutter tried to reach them with the oars."

It seems a fitting prelude to an equally brutal conflict, the First China War. The conditions of trade with the Chinese had not changed much since the sixteenth-century account collected in Hakluyt's Voyages. The English found themselves constrained more or less to the Portuguese had been when they went to Canton to trade; "they must remain there but certain days and when they come in at the gate of the city, they must enter their names in a book, and when they go out at night they must put out their names. They may not lie in the towns all night, but must lie in their boats..." The Chinamen are very superstitious, and do not trust strangers.

And quite right too. The Chinese balance of trade with the British, in silk and tea, was initially in their favour, but with the huge growth of opium imports from India the outflow of Chinese silver became prodigious; in 1839 the Chinese banned the traffic and burned £3,000,000-worth, 20,000 chests, of European opium stocks. The British assembled an expeditionary force in Singapore, equipped with a deadly new weapon: steamships capable of towing men-of-war for hundreds of miles up the wide rivers of China to bring their firepower to bear on the inland cities.

As Cree remarks, "It seems a pity to carry war into such a peaceful country, but one must leave that consideration to the Home authorities." Chusan is the first victim ("on the smoke clearing the Chinese army were to be seen running in all directions"); in March 1841 the Rattlesnake runs into the Canton estuary and anchored "off the NW end of the Island of Hong Kong, a low, desolate, looking place with only a few fishermen's huts to be seen"; Journeying into the interior to join the fleet approaching Canton, Cree notes the "many dead bodies floating down the river, naked and blown out, some of them mutilated by our shot from the ships' broadsides"; records the constant small engagements, the "tobbling of shells into the sea"; enjoys the moonlit nights on deck and admires the Celestial women, particularly the Cantonese boat girls; "some not too modestly clad".

In 1843 Cree is promoted Surgeon

into HM Steam Sloop Vixen, and sets sail for the Savaak River to rescue a grounded survey vessel. He meets inspirations for Conrad's Lord Jim—a local lord, a white Rajah, a Somerset gentleman once of the Indian Army who put down a revolt in the province with the twenty man crew of his schooner the *Royakshi*, and who kept "great state", Cree tells us.

He later steams up the Brunei River in Borneo to a Pausan-like settlement, "an extraordinary looking place built on piles, extending a couple of miles along the sandbanks on each side of the river, generally nearly dry at low water. The houses are mean, built of wood, thatched with palm leaves..." The British intrigue with the party at Court keen to develop trade, led by Murda Hassim (a Doramin figure), against those who believe that piracy is altogether more fun and much less effort, who follow Pangeran Usop. Like Sherif Ali in Lord Jim, he has a stockade about a mile up the river, and the British prepare to blow it to pieces. Anchored in mid-stream at night, flanked by the exotic menace of the jungled banks, a young marine understandably dreams that a Malay is slicing his throat, and Cree thereby discovers that he is not as well armed as he might be:

About 2 in the morning I was awake by a fearful shriek, followed by a confused sort of cry; I heard someone cry out "They are boarding us over the starboard bow." Wilcox, the 1st Lieutenant, rushed on deck and sung out "Beat to quarters." My half awake thoughts were that a desperate attack had been made on us by Malays; I seized my sword, but it having been such a peaceable weapon, I refused to leave the scabbard, being routed in.

With Rajah Brooke, Cree joins the

naval expedition against Sherif Usman, "a desperate fellow, of Arab descent, with a following of Arabs, Malays, Illanuns and Sulu people; all pirates"—again like Jim's adversary Sherif Ali, "an Arab half-breed" with his "tribes in the interior" and "wild men". The pirate fort, near the mouth of a small river on Marudu Bay, beneath the great mountain, Kinabalu, is protected by a boom, slung from bank to bank, on which their guns are accurately laid, and against which the British boats are forced by the tide. Cree does the best he can for the "dreadful wounds" left by round shot, operating "on a crowded deck, by the light of half a dozen dip candles, with too many excited lookers on"; and, after the action, he amputates the grapeshot-mangled arm of a rescued slave-girl.

at which she never squeaked, but held her baby tightly in her other arm... she was frightfully ugly, but she had no clothes to speak of, and soon rigged her out in white jacket and trousers. The picaninny was made a pet of, and it was laughable to see a rough old sailor carefully making pap out of a ship's biscuit and feeding the baby.

In March, 1846, Cree "Went on shore, in old England the first time for nearly seven years." He is troubled by multiple Prussian small deaths-in-life—the failure of anyone to fit his fresh, unchanged memories of them; the "number of pretty girls quite bewildered one". A further splash of large-scale pirate hunting in the far East takes Cree to 1852, when he returns home, and, deciding he can bear it no longer, marries a pretty girl himself. All that suppressed yearning for every second nature female, colonial daughter and officer's wife certainly entitled Cree to enjoy his

honeymoon; and I think we may imagine that he did. Alongside the pioneer bride, in an attic bedroom in Paris, his painting of the Grande Cascade, St Cloud, where, he tells us, "A single shoot up to 140 feet; tops all the big grounds, high above the trees, and like a shower of silver."

The Journals end with Cree's account of war in the Crimea—the pictures of mortar-boats at sea, before Sebastopol, the women themselves like cooking-pots, suspended from a frame of poles, huge black cauldrons, their tilted slightly towards the shore; and astonished descriptions of the size of the battles ("Such an infernal din as never heard before, from 500 or 600 big guns"), and with private lamentations of the official incompetence ("the old pluck of Benbow and Nelson has departed"). He is a keen recorder of new weaponry ("three fine floating batteries had arrived, each square-looking iron boxes with ten heavy guns of a side, each firing slowly against the large fort, a fired away vigorously against them. It was strange to see the shot striking their iron sides and flying off again, generally split into pieces. By 9.40 the batteries had steamed into position and then opened a terrible fire, in volley which brought down the water wall of the fort in cartloads at each volley") and he provides a constant professional commentary on medical conditions he captured: Russian hospital, for instance, much worse than the British equivalent, "smell—oh, how it smelt!"

Michael Levine has equipped the remarkable document with an efficient introduction and running notes, details of Cree's various ships, and biographies of the dramatic persons and numerous very clear maps.

## SOCIAL HISTORY

# Working towards the Wedding

Mary Lefkowitz

DEBBIE LUKATSKY and SANDY BARNETT TOBACK

The Jewish American Princess Handbook  
440pp. Arlington Heights, Ill: Turnbull and Wiloughby. \$4.95

ANNA SEQUOIA (née Schneider)  
The Official J.A.P. Handbook  
440pp. New York: New American Library. \$5.95.

Recently a friend gave my (second) husband (an Englishman) a copy of *The Preppy Handbook*, for use as a guide to the dress and behaviour of the sort of American society in which (for better or worse) he would now be expected to find himself. A preppy is a graduate of what in England would be called a public school, but in America the universities, the Ivies (Harvard, Yale, Princeton) and many other less well known colleges with similar standards and disciplines. The male graduates of these places, like *Love Story's* Oliver Barrett IV, go on to become lawyers or doctors; the women tend to take oversteering or useful jobs which serve as a kind of holding pattern until they have found their preppy husband. Eligibility to become a preppy is determined mainly by birth, but also by ambition; a few child (until very recently) preppy women like Jewish or Catholic can be admitted to a prep school if he or she is "rich". *The Preppy Handbook* spells out in detail the names of their schools, their favourite clothes and where to buy them, where to live, and what to do, at every stage of life.

information that a generation ago preppy-training like myself could only glean nervously from between the lines of real preppies' conversations. They did not go to our stores (as shops from Tahiti to the West Indies, was the Bounty's task.

There follows a brief account of the events leading up to the mutiny, and the mutiny itself. All Bounty historians are then faced with the fact that the fate of those of those who remained voluntarily on Tahiti sketchedly documented, while the hard core who settled on Pitcairn are the object of speculation and unsubstantiated recounting years later by the few who survived what seemed to have been a series of misadventures occasioned by sexual and racial jealousy. Christian gives less than two pages to Bligh's open boat voyage, the greatest acts of survival and examples of navigation in maritime history, and some seventy-five pages to the fate of those who remained on board. The rest of the book tells of the author's own ill-starred and finally successful attempt to sail to Pitcairn, which is the most entertaining and amusing part of this enthusiastically written account.

The strength of the Bounty legend lies not only in its colour, excitement and passion. Prejudice has kept it alive, too, and true to tradition Christian provides us with a devastating portrayal of Captain Bligh as Charles Laughton gave on the screen. When Bligh does not "barge" and "wheelie", he is full of "barbs" and "poisoned words". He actions and "poisoned words" better than a "four-mouthed bully", while when it came to dealing with the natives, his feet were "all but coward does, I fear, straight credulity."

The author belongs to what Brian Tuchman defines as the "must-have" school. His hero's thoughts are subject for speculation, and the mutineers "certainly missed many things" about what he would do when he had the Bounty. It was, incidentally, not unusual to include a commendation of a ship destined for a long voyage. Nor was the Bounty the first British ship to visit Tahiti in the 18th century. Captain Cook caught part of the mutiny in 1769, 1774 and 1777. All this is not an important contribution to Bountyana.

What happens when our theories are tested is another matter. How many today, for instance, would look likely on a boat which appeared on the public beach "displaying his nakedness in a most disgraceful manner" and ended by "displaying a thousand spectators when he was one of the merry pranks of young David, Earl of Pembroke, son of the fifth Earl of Devon, Earl, in 1662, he, his younger brother, narrowly escaped when, after a street brawl, they were charged with murder. Nor would he be easy to find excuses for the mutiny. The young thingy were all, this is not an important contribution to Bountyana.

are called in America) or wear our clothes, but I soon realized it was better to do what they did. So I was delighted when our friend seemed to include me in their special world.

Until very recently new arrivals to this country sought to acquire the identity of the first settlers; not of course as they looked when they left the cramped hold of the Mayflower to their tiny cottages at Plymouth, but as they looked and spoke when one saw their confident faces and three-piece striped greysuits behind the vice-president's or the Principal's imposing and polished mahogany desk. But now, as the result of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, it has become fashionable to recover one's "roots", and, as necessary, to romanticize them. Only two years after *The Preppy Handbook* appeared, and with it official Preppy pins, tote bags and calendars, one finds on the check-out counters of bookstores in the more exclusive suburbs little stacks of one of the two competing handbooks on how to be a JAP, or Jewish American Princess. The JAP species of course existed when I was in prep school but no one had a clear name for it; now both books claim that non-Jews will not only want to see but even be one.

As in *The Preppy Handbook*, nothing in either JAP book is left to the imagination. The more comprehensive of the two books, Sequoia's *Official J.A.P. Handbook*, suggests how anyone, Italian, Greek, even WASPs or Blacks (yet) may become a JAP. Identity is defined primarily in terms of clothes and other possessions. But where the preppy female would wear her brother's outgrown sailing jersey, the JAP would sport one of her own new dozens of cashmere sweaters. Everything the JAP owns will be expensive, but of course also, good value, ie, bought in a sale or wholesale through family connections. While the young preppy mother drives a Volvo (a sturdy car that will last for years), the young JAP mother drives (ironically) a

more impressive BMW or Mercedes. Just as a preppy female never outgrows the imprint her school and social background make on her, so the JAP even in her seventies never outgrows being a Princess: she loves to get presents (even if it is her six dressings gown), to be spoiled, to luxuriate in her wealth and in the variety of her possessions. What does a JAP make for dinner? According to Lukatsky and Touback, Reservations. What is her favourite wine? "I want to go to Miami Beach." Feminists will note that the JAP doesn't want to be liberated or even independent; instead she always remains someone's pampered little girl.

Both books describe accurately the essential elements of the family life that sustains such princesses. (1) *Maintaining a feeling of inherent guilt*. In first generation families, this was done directly: "no more to eat! don't you like my cooking?" Now guilt is transmitted electronically: "why weren't you home when I called?" A mother, like Mission Control talking to astronauts in space, can keep tabs on her scattered children and grandchildren by telephone, without leaving the comparative comfort of her Florida condominium; JAP daughters make trunk calls from their college rooms to make sure that Mommy has watered the plants in her room at home. (2) *Perennial dissatisfaction* with the appearance, behaviour, and performance of the other members of the family, or as my cousin Nan (PhD, Harvard) once put it, "everything you do is wrong". The principal subject of maternal complaint, as both handbooks observe, is the JAP's hair. Hair, in a way, is the perfect subject, since adjustments to its appearance can be made frequently and at relatively reasonable cost (compared to the surgical reconstruction of her nose). Clothes and boyfriends also provide profitable grounds for the most chronic JAP mode of argument, communication, the argument, Lukatsky and Touback offer a

which followed Lord Pembroke excelled himself. He felled Cony with a single blow and "when he was down, jumped upon his back, his stomach, and his side, before proceeding to kick him unconscious". Cony died a week later. Strange as it seems, an excuse of sorts was found for Pembroke. He was charged with manslaughter and acquitted under an ancient statute which allowed peers "benefit of clergy" for a first offence. Two years later he was in court again. This time he was charged with the murder of a policeman whom he first wounded with his sword and then battered to death with a staff. Again he was found guilty, but with the help of his family, he was granted a Royal Pardon. There were no more charges, but he is said to have committed twenty-six more murders.

Sykes's book is packed with secondaries like Buckthorn and Pembroke. He has combed aristocratic archives and assembled a colourful collection of rakes, rogues and rudes from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some women are included but the men are the greatest villains. They are rarely endearing and never admirable. Many of them are downright despicable. For all that, with one or two exceptions, they provide material for lively reading.

That Sykes chose Lord William Paget, a nineteenth-century sponger, to lead his flock of portly pigs, No Lady on a Saddle, would look likely on a boat which appeared on the public beach "displaying his nakedness in a most disgraceful manner" and ended by "displaying a thousand spectators when he was one of the merry pranks of young David, Earl of Pembroke, son of the fifth Earl of Devon, Earl, in 1662, he, his younger brother, narrowly escaped when, after a street brawl, they were charged with murder. Nor would he be easy to find excuses for the mutiny. The young thingy were all, this is not an important contribution to Bountyana.

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convincing scenario for the JAP's *bat mitzvah*, including six fights with Mother, about such cosmic matters as the colour of her nail-polish and pantyhose, or indeed nothing at all. (3) *Exclusiveness*. Interminable with or without great trust in govin (gentiles) and other outsiders is disapproved of. The JAP is also discouraged from unwinning pet animals, because they will track in dirt and (far worse) germs, and also cause allergies; note that the JAP is allergic or has trouble with her skin, while the *shiksa* (working-class gentile girl) has acne.

It soon becomes apparent that whatever is Jewish about the JAP has nothing to do with her religion. The *bat mitzvah* is clearly seen as a puberty rite, the JAP equivalent of a WASP coming-out party; the Wedding, the prime goal of the JAP's life, is a purely social event, celebrating not so much the start of a new family as the co-opting into the old family of a new paying member, to help keep the supply of cashmere and Gucci leather coming in. Nor—as so often in Europe—is being Jewish associated with intellectual achievement. The JAP's education is only a means to the unquestionably desirable end of securing a husband; she chooses her "major" or course of university study because of the practical use to which she can put it (ie, where she might best meet the right man). JAPs are naturally clever and industrious (unless they have learning or emotional disabilities, but none by definition can be stupid or lazy), but the grown JAP reads catalogues of clothing rather than books. It would do greater justice to Jews in the rest of the world if the acronym were written JAP for the creature, at least as described in these two books, is more American than Jewish, a product of the suburban diaspora of big cities, and most particularly of the Mecca (sic) of the clothing world, New York. Even the generalization of the role of Princess is American, as the case of that archetypal (*shiksa*) American Princess Undine Spragg will illustrate: "It's normal for a man to work hard for his womenfolk", indeed it is "the custom of the country", as Edith Wharton wrote in 1913.

Though neither book says so explicitly, the JAP they describe

belongs to the third generation of East European immigrants, ie, is the offspring of the first generation to have made good money and moved to what someone born in New York City regards as the country (eg, large towns in the vast conurbation around New York like Scarsdale or South Orange or Lawrence, LI). One supposes that the females of certain orthodox sects are omitted because they aren't American, if that term, as in these two books, is understood to mean materialistic, upwardly mobile, efficient, and culturally limited. Also excluded is the view of the *Yiddishkeit* (Manhattan) P, usually of German extraction, "no Yiddish spoken here... colleges tend to be pure Ivy disdains designer labels" (Sequoia's definition), who is clearly pseudo-preppy.

Still, it is probably a good sign that JAPs can be thought to epitomize rather than simply be assimilated into characteristics of American society that are familiar to and even admired in much of the rest of the world. If *The Preppy Handbook* can serve as a model, now that JAPiness is official, it will soon be considered normal. In America even satire, if it is sufficiently populized, can be transmuted into a form of approval: I knew that the revolution of the 1960s was over when I saw advertised in the Saks Fifth Avenue Christmas catalogue (yes, I do read them) a denim jacket with fox lining—the battered jeans of the student rebels had been converted, along with silver gumballs, into radical chic. *The Preppy Handbook* claimed that pink and green, whales and ducks, along with the Izod crocodile (sic; despite popular belief, it's not an alligator) were favoured preppy colours and symbols. Within a year the not particularly trendy Boston department store Filene's displayed in its normally conservative men's department kelly green trousers on which pink whales the size of food crocodiles had been embroidered. I suppose someone must have bought them because they weren't around when I went back (I confess) to check out the late summer sales. Presumably, then, anti-Semitism will soon be replaced by pro-Semitism. In the wake of preppiness and JAPiness. Since I'm an American, I'd believe it, if I weren't Jewish.

how the Queen, Prince Philip and Prince Charles take their coffee; the Queen has it white with sugar, Philip black with sugar, and Charles "none at all—he doesn't like it".

There are a number of inaccuracies. In a list of upsetting diseases suffered by English monarchs, the Princess of Wales (who is not a monarch) is given homesickness (which is not a disease) when she was at finishing school. We are also told that, of eight titles by which members of the Royal Family are known, the Princess was called "Miss Diana" by her pupils at kindergarten. (What else would they have called her?) The young lady in question is referred to throughout the book as "Princess Diana", which she is not, as she is not the daughter of a prince of blood royal—she is the Princess of Wales, the Duchess of Cornwall, and half a dozen other things.

I was interested to learn that the Queen serves pigeons; can strip and service an engine, removes cork fleas personally and has adopted some leper children. If only because such anecdotes may achieve a flagging dinner-party. Can Queen Anne's coffin really have been wider than it was long? It matters little. This is fodder for conversation, not enlightenment.

King Montgomery-Massingberd has contributed a delightful list of anecdotes, which includes the rough good sense of a King of Hanover who, on the request of a courtier who said, "Allow me to throw myself at Your Majesty's feet", replied, "Rubbish! If you did, you would split your trousers!" The compilers have omitted, however, their most important list of all, and that is the bibliography of sources wherein they found their weird mixture of the dull, the quirky, and the interesting.

## Top trivia

Brian Masters

CRAIG BROWN and LESLEY CUNLIFFE

The Book of Royal Lists  
288pp Routledge and Kegan Paul. 65.95. 0 7100 9358 6

The *Book of Royal Lists* is not so much a book as a collection of notes for a dozen potential books and items lifted from two dozen others. The current fact for lists is harmless enough, and the most assiduous compilers may produce lists which are either joyfully entertaining or extremely useful, for reference. The trouble with this book is that Craig Brown and Lesley Cunliffe cannot make up their minds whether to be serious or silly, and the result is a woeful hybrid.

Among the useful categories are ten ways in which the Queen could use her Royal Prerogative, burial places of Kings, Queens and Consorts since the Conquest, second sons who have succeeded to the throne, four holders of warrants from Edward VIII, longest reigns, last words, royal aliases, and the line of succession from one to fifty-six. It is also helpful to have the Civil List at hand. Peregrine Worsthorne has contributed a ten-Blessed-of-Constitutional Monarchy, of which the last, "Political wisdom and experience", is constantly under-rated.

To find these nuggets the reader must pass through pages of trivia. These alternatives to "My husband and I" which the Queen has used; members of the Royal Family who have been spanked; royal views on English weather; members of the Royal Family who have tripped or fallen down; and

belongs to the third generation of East European immigrants, ie, is the offspring of the first generation to have made good money and moved to what someone born in New York City regards as the country (eg, large towns in the vast conurbation around New York like Scarsdale or South Orange or Lawrence, LI). One supposes that the females of certain orthodox sects are omitted because they aren't American, if that term, as in these two books, is understood to mean materialistic, upwardly mobile, efficient, and culturally limited. Also excluded is the view of the *Yiddishkeit* (Manhattan) P, usually of German extraction, "no Yiddish spoken here... colleges tend to be pure Ivy disdains designer labels" (Sequoia's definition), who is clearly pseudo-preppy.

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